

AGENDA FOR

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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To: All Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillors : M Hankey (Chair); S Carter; D Cassidy; A Cummings; J Daly; L Fitzwalter; P Heneghan; M James; S Nuttall; D O'Hanlon and T Tariq; vacancy

Dear Member/Colleague

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which will be held as follows:-

Date:	Tuesday, 8 October 2013
Place:	Peel Room, Bury Town Hall
Time:	7.00 pm
Briefing Facilities:	If Opposition Members and Co-opted Members require briefing on any particular item on the Agenda, the appropriate Director/Senior Officer originating the related report should be contacted.
Notes:	A pre-meeting will be held at 6.30pm in the Irwell Room

AGENDA

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider whether they have an interest in any of the matters on the agenda and, if so, to formally declare that interest.

3 MINUTES (*Pages 1 - 8*)

Minutes of the last meeting held on 4 September 2013 are attached for approval.

4 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A period of 30 minutes has been set aside for Members of the public to ask questions on matters considered at the last meeting and set out in the minutes or on the agenda for tonight's meeting.

5 RECYCLING REVIEW - UPDATE (*Pages 9 - 14*)

Following last years scrutiny review, an Action Plan is attached providing an update on recommendations

6 CORPORATE PLAN PROGRESS REPORT - QUARTER 1 2013-2014 (*Pages 15 - 40*)

A report from the Leader of the Council is attached.

7 CHILDREN'S SERVICES ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT APRIL 2012 - MARCH 2013 (*Pages 41 - 52*)

Report from Jane Whittam, Assistant Team Manager, is attached.

8 WELFARE REFORM (*Pages 53 - 130*)

Claire Jenkins will give a presentation at the meeting.

9 URGENT BUSINESS

Any other business which by reason of special circumstances the Chair agrees may be considered as a matter of urgency.

Minutes of: **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 4 September 2013

Present: Councillor M Hankey(in the Chair);
Councillors M Bailey; D Cassidy; S Carter; A J Cummings;
J Daly; L Fitzwalter; M James; P Heneghan; S Nuttall; D
O’Hanlon and T Tariq

Public in attendance: 1 member of the public was present at the meeting.

Also in attendance: Councillor Campbell– Cabinet Member for Children and Families.

Councillor J Smith – Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs.

Apologies for absence:

OSC.303 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Heneghan declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Minute OSC.306 below, Ofsted Inspection (SLAC) Action Plan, as the newly appointed Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Families and took no part in discussions on this item.

Councillor Fitzwalter declared a personal interest in Minute OSC.307 below, Publication Core Strategy, as a member of the Fletcher Bank Action Group.

Councillor O’Hanlon declared a personal interest in the Financial Reports before the Committee as a garage tenant of Six Town Housing.

OSC.304 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions asked by members of the public present at the meeting.

OSC.305 MINUTES

It was agreed:

1. That the Minutes of the meeting, held on 11 June 2013, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
2. That the Minutes of the meeting, held on 14 August 2013, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OSC.306 OFSTED INSPECTION (SLAC) ACTION PLAN

Further to Minute OSC.110 of the meeting of this Committee, held on 11 June 2013, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families submitted a report setting out an updated draft Action Plan in respect of Children's Safeguarding and Social Care.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families reported that the new Ofsted Inspection Framework for Children's Safeguarding and Social Care was due for publication in September 2013 and due for implementation in November 2013. It was explained that the draft Action Plan had focussed on the proposed key judgement with regard to the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection. A final version of the Action Plan will developed and presented following the publication of the Ofsted Inspection Framework.

Questions and comments were invited and the following issues were raised:

- In response to questions around the inspection process, the Executive Director of Children's Services referred to the recent experiences of neighbouring authorities and highlighted the more stringent process which had resulted in a number of Council's being deemed inadequate. It was explained that liaison was taking place with neighbouring authorities who had recently been inspected. With regard to the issue of possible changes to the framework, the Executive Director stated that he did not expect the notion of what is good practice to change fundamentally.
- Councillor Tariq sought assurances as the level of confidence within the Department in relation to a future inspection. The Cabinet Member and Officers explained that a clear idea of the inspection framework would obviously help preparations and reported that there were clear signs of improving performance data since June.
- In response to questions from Councillor O'Hanlon concerning quantitative and qualitative data, the Assistant Director Social Care and Safeguarding explained that the Action Plan was a high level document with a number of service level plans sitting below. It was reported that the Department was in the process of developing a qualitative tool to assess the service. With regard to quantitative data compliance and statutory assessment timescales, the Assistant Director suggested this could be submitted to the Committee.
- During discussion of this item, the Executive Director reported that the Department were carrying out a consistent, systematic assessment across all teams, which had resulted in changes to the way staff are managed assessed and supported.

It was agreed:

1. That, following the publication of the new Ofsted Inspection Framework, a further report be submitted to this Committee in early 2014.

OSC.307 PUBLICATION CORE STRATEGY

Paul Allen, Head of Planning Policy and Projects, gave a presentation regarding the Council's Core Strategy consultation. The Core Strategy will be a key document at the heart of Bury's Local Plan. It will set out the long-term vision for the future development of the borough to 2029 and will contain strategic policies that are required to deliver that vision.

The consultation on the Publication Core Strategy runs for six weeks (2 August to 13 September 2013) at which point any comments or representations made will be submitted to the Secretary of State for consideration. An examination of the Strategy will take place in March 2014 and it is anticipated that the final Core Strategy would be adopted in September 2014.

The presentation provided information on the following issues that are likely to face challenge as the Strategy progresses to Examination:

- Housing Target
- Gin Hall
- Retail Capacity
- Wind Turbines

Questions and comments were invited from the Committee and the following issues were raised:

- Councillor Daly referred to the previous consultations and versions of the Strategy and highlighted that it was only recently that residents of Walmsley had become aware of proposals relating to Gin Hall. In response to questions about the robustness of the consultation process, the Head of Planning Policy and Projects stated that he believed the process had been open and transparent and had taken into account the responses submitted.
- With regard to recent amendments to the Strategy, approved by Full Council on 3 July 2013, it was explained that the amended Strategy was still available for consultation, with any responses or comments being considered as part of the Examination process.
- Councillor Daly sought clarification on the "very special circumstances" which could lead to the development of the Gin Hall site. The Head of Planning Policy and Projects referred to National Greenbelt Policy Guidance which sets out detail of appropriate development within the Green Belt.
- With regard to the Housing Target, the Head of Planning Policy and Projects explained that the role of the Strategy was to identify broad areas where development will be accommodated. The Strategy includes a target of 400 units per annum which it is felt can be achieved without the need to release Green Belt land.
- In response to a question from Councillor Tariq it was reported that the Strategy looked to protect employment generating sites and looked to develop areas for employment in locations such as Pilsworth, Irwell Bank, Chamberhall, Townside and land at Prestwich Hospital.

- With regard to the issue of wind turbines, it was reported that although work had been done on average wind speeds, which showed that Holcombe Moor would be suitable, any future proposal would still have to be considered against other planning policies.
- In response to a question concerning Gin Hall from Councillor Daly, the Head of Planning Policy and Projects confirmed that the Council would not assist any potential developer by removing the tip site.

It was agreed:

1. That the Head of Planning Policy and Projects be thanked for his presentation.
2. That formal representations on the Publication Core Strategy be submitted in writing or by email to the Planning Policy and Projects Section no later than 13 September 2013.

OSC.308 CORPORATE PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

A report was submitted by the Leader of the Council outlining the progress during quarter four 2012–2013 for the corporate performance indicators and projects within the Bury Council Corporate Plan. The information is extracted from the Performance Information Management System (PIMS) and provided by the responsible services.

The Assistant Director of Business Re-Design & Development referred to the importance of having valid and relevant measures to monitor Council progress and that the list of indicators would continue to be kept under review.

In response to the under achievement of the indicator relating to the percentage of children and young people in care achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs it was reported that the figure is based on a small cohort where the results of a few individuals can have a major impact on the indicator. Councillor Carter enquired whether there was any indication that the percentage could have been affected by changes nationally to the way the exams are graded.

With regard to the issue of recycling food waste from schools an undertaking was given to update the Committee on the progress of measures to increase recycling in schools. Councillor Fitzwalter highlighted the difficulty faced by schools being able to afford to carry out the initiative.

During discussion of this item, Sarah Marshall, Performance Officer, undertook to provide a response to the Committee to questions and issues raised in relation to the following:

- Further detail on the “Working Age People on Out of Work Benefits” indicator
- The impact of Day Opportunities Strategy on Wards
- Online usage figures in respect of Libraries
- Request for progress on recycling in schools and whether a specific performance measure could be incorporated

It was agreed:

That Officers be thanked for the good performance highlighted in the report and a further update be submitted at the end of Quarter 1, 2013/14.

OSC.309 REVENUE AND HRA OUTTURN 2012/13

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs submitted a report providing Members with details of:

- the revenue outturn figures in respect of the last financial year, 2012/2013, detailing specific carry-forward requests and the proposed application of the carry-forward rules;
- major variances between the revised estimate and the outturn;
- the level of school balances;
- transfers to / from reserves;
- HRA outturn for the year;
- The minimum level of balances in the light of risk assessments

The figures in the report are consistent with the figures included within the Statement of Accounts which were both approved by the Responsible Finance Officer and presented to Audit Committee on 25 June 2013.

In response to a question about the issue of school balances, the Cabinet Member explained that a balance control review was held annually where schools were required to justify any balances deemed to be excessive.

During discussion of this item, Members highlighted the 2.8% increase in rent arrears during the last financial year. The Cabinet Member stated that changes to welfare had compounded the issue and referred to the pro-active work being undertaken to work with people with rent arrears. Claire Jenkins, Head of Customer Support & Collections, highlighted the individual interventions that were being undertaken to help customers manage debts.

It was agreed:

That the report be noted.

OSC.310 CAPITAL OUTTURN 2012/2013

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs submitted a report providing Members with details of the:

- The capital outturn figures in respect of the last financial year 2012/13;
- Major variances between the Revised Estimate and the Outturn;
- The financing of the Capital Programme in 2012/13;
- Re-profile of budgets/allocations and funding into 2013/14; and
- Details of the capital receipts received during the year.

It was agreed:

1. That the final capital outturn for 2012/2013, and explanations for major variances, as detailed in Appendix A and the report submitted, be noted.

2. That the financing of the Capital Programme in 2012/2013, as detailed in Paragraph 3.5 of the report, be noted.
3. That the re-profiled/slippage requests and associated funding into 2013/2014 as detailed in Appendix B of the report be noted.
4. That the level of Capital Receipts realised in year as detailed in Appendix C of the report be noted.

OSC.311 2012 – 2013 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs submitted a report providing details of Treasury Management activities during 2012/13. The Council undertakes Treasury Management Activities in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of

Practice on Treasury Management, which requires that the Council receives an annual strategy report by 31 March for the year ahead and an annual review report of the previous year by 30 September.

In considering the report the Chair, Councillor Hankey, congratulated the officers involved in the report for their work.

It was agreed:

That in accordance with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management, the report be noted.

OSC.312 CORPORATE FINANCIAL MONITORING – APRIL TO JUNE 2013

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs submitted a report which provided information on the Council's financial position for the period up to June 2013 and projected the likely outturn at the end of 2013/2014.

The report included details of Prudential Indicators in accordance with CIPFA's Prudential Code.

Questions and comments were invited and the following issues were raised:

- In response to a question concerning the fact that the £400k saving had not yet been achieved in respect of waste management, it was reported that a report would be submitted to the next Cabinet meeting.
- With regard to the current projected overspend, it was explained that historically the Quarter 1 figure had often resolved itself before the end of the year following remedial action. Councillor Smith explained that through the Start Chamber process, Cabinet Members and Senior Officers were constantly monitoring the budget position and taking swift action where necessary.
- In response to concerns about the delay in savings from the Department of Communities and Neighbourhoods, the Cabinet Member stressed that

- these were delays due to consultations around staff restructures and expressed confidence that the savings would be realised.

It was agreed:

1. That the financial position of the Council as at 30 June 2013 be noted.
2. That the s151 Officer's assessment of the minimum level of balances be noted.

OSC.313 REQUEST FOR OVERVIEW PROJECT GROUP

Councillor Cummings requested that the Committee give consideration to setting up an Overview Project Group to look at the issue of School Admissions in the Borough.

It was agreed:

1. That an Overview Project Group be set up to look at the issue of School Admissions, with full membership sought from the Political Group Leaders.
2. That the Group referred to in (1) above be Chaired by Councillor Fitzwalter.

(**Note:** This item which did not appear on the agenda for the meeting was allowed by the Chair to be considered as a matter of urgency to enable the Group to commence its work at the earliest opportunity.)

COUNCILLOR M HANKEY
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 9.30pm)

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RECYCLING REVIEW ACTION PLAN 2013

Recommendation	Reason	Steps involved	When	Lead	Progress
<p>Rec 1</p> <p>That this Group recognises and congratulates the hard work that has been undertaken by the Council Employees across the authority and the residents of the Borough to reduce the amount of residual waste being sent to landfill and to increase the amount of waste being recycled.</p>	<p>The Group believes that both residents and Council Employees have worked extremely hard to get to the levels of recycling that have currently been achieved but also feels that for this to improve the hard work should be congratulated and promoted.</p>	<p>Promote the achievements already made in every way possible; via local; press, Council website, Township Forums, use of banners etc</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Neil Long</p>	<p>Recycling needs to be promoted at every opportunity to ensure that it becomes a way of life.</p> <p>Ongoing - continuous</p> <p>All Township Forums attended to promote recycling and to thank residents for progress already made</p> <p>A new promotional campaign was launched in September 2012 borough wide. Campaign being relaunched in coming weeks.</p> <p>Communications campaign ongoing and website promoted</p>
<p>Rec 2</p> <p>That Ward Councillors are encouraged to become 'Recycling Champions' in their areas by promoting recycling wherever possible and work with the Waste Management Section to identify solutions for specific areas."</p>	<p>This will help Members to promote recycling to residents who may not be aware of it and to highlight any areas of concern. It will also promote neighbourhood working.</p>	<p>Provide Members with as much knowledge of recycling as possible to enable them to pass this advice on. This particularly applies to initiatives in their Ward.</p>	<p>ongoing</p>	<p>Glenn Stuart</p> <p>Neil Long</p>	<p>Packs should be provided for newly elected Members to promote recycling. Visits to Greater Manchester's (GMWDA's) household waste treatment facilities should be available for any Councillor that wants to attend.</p> <p>Available to all Councillors</p>

Recommendation	Reason	Steps involved	When	Lead	Progress
		That Members are encouraged to contact waste management with issues that they have in relation to specific recycling schemes or recycling issues of residents. However, questions/ complaints specific to collections should always be directed through the CCC.	ongoing		<p>Ensure that Councillors have the correct contact information for their wards. n/a. there is no specific Ward information.</p> <p>Already offer pre Council training sessions and attendance at Member Development Sessions.</p> <p>All Councillors are school governors and governors receive information and training on recycling.</p>
<p>Rec 3</p> <p>That, to assist with ongoing work in relation to contaminated bins, all new bins are numbered by the Council before being delivered to properties and households where the bins are not numbered are encouraged to do so.</p>	<p>Will give residents' 'ownership' and ensure that waste operatives can correctly record where recycling is not being undertaken.</p>	<p>All new bins should be pre-numbered before leaving the depot.</p>	ongoing	Glenn Stuart	<p>This is already being carried out and will continue.</p> <p>All new bin deliveries are labelled by white number stickers and black marker.</p>
<p>Rec 4</p> <p>That the use of enforcement in relation to contaminated bins be considered – this would only be as a last resort and for repeat offenders.</p>	<p>This would act as both a deterrent and a warning to those that are continuing to contaminate their bins.</p>	<p>Identify steps needed to be taken and any issues that may be encountered.</p> <p>What staffing would be required?</p>	Sept 2013	<p>Neil Long</p> <p>Lorraine Chamberlin</p>	<p>This is currently undertaken by other Councils, ask them for information on any issues and obstacles they encountered.</p> <p>A report entitled 'Business Case for an Enhanced Recycling Service that Aims to Achieve a Household Waste Recycling Rate of 50% and Beyond'</p>

Recommendation	Reason	Steps involved	When	Lead	Progress
					<p>was approved at Cabinet on 18 September.</p> <p>The report included reference to a new 'Waste Regulatory and Enforcement Policy' and the establishment of a Waste Enforcement Team. The team should be in place this calendar year.</p>
<p>Rec 5</p> <p>That all waste operatives are regularly reminded to use the software correctly as this may assist to reduce the number of complaints received and the number of missed collections.</p>	<p>This will ensure that the correct information is being recorded and is reliable. Will help to record where issues are occurring regularly and enable action to be taken.</p>	<p>Provide written reminders in memo's and verbal reminders as and when required to all operatives.</p>	<p>July 2013</p>	<p>Glenn Stuart</p>	<p>Significant investment was made into the in-cab technology and as such, the information gathered using technology should be as accurate as it can be.</p> <p>Continuous</p> <p>Waste operatives attend ongoing training and the software used is further developed as technology becomes available</p>
<p>Rec 6</p> <p>That Members should receive regular reports setting out targets versus actuals and highlighting where improvements need to be made and how this can be done.</p>	<p>This will highlight areas where targets are not being reached and allow Councillors to target specific areas that may fall within their wards.</p>	<p>Liaise with Members on what information they would like to receive.</p> <p>Use information gathered from the systems in place to monitor targets.</p>	<p>ongoing</p>	<p>Neil Long</p> <p>Glenn Stuart</p>	<p>Look at what is required and the possibility of merging recommendations 6, 7 and 8</p> <p>Investigate what information is available and how this can be provided to Councillors.</p> <p>Can this be done ward by ward? It cannot be done by Ward. The service does not operate along Ward boundaries.</p>

Recommendation	Reason	Steps involved	When	Lead	Progress
					<p>Can this be done electronically – identify how regularly this would be required.</p> <p>Performance information is available to Members periodically and this will be ongoing.</p>
<p>Rec 7</p> <p>That the possibility of carrying out specific exception reporting or analytical research is considered to look at trends and highlight where improvements can be made.</p>	<p>Should identify ward specific issues which can then be targeted.</p>	<p>Identify how the software can be utilised to provide this type of information.</p>	<p>ongoing</p>	<p>Neil Long</p> <p>Glenn Stuart</p>	<p>See Rec 6</p> <p>Regular reports through portfolio holder to Star Chamber.</p> <p>Collection routes not ward specific but certain areas are recognised and if issues arise are targeted.</p>
<p>Rec 8</p> <p>That complaints relating to missed bin collections are monitored by area to highlight any patterns.</p>	<p>This would highlight trends and may identify where education was required to be carried out.</p> <p>The information could be included on with the updates to Members.</p>	<p>Customer contact centre information – meet with relevant officers to discuss how the information can be extracted.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Neil Long</p> <p>Glenn Stuart</p>	<p>See Rec 6</p> <p>The developments with the in-cab technology show where bins are not put out for collection. This technology also allows for operatives to report problems to the contact centre if access to a street or estate was not possible.</p>

Recommendation	Reason	Steps involved	When	Lead	Progress
<p>Rec 9</p> <p>That something similar to the interactive games that were used on the visit to the recycling centre should be developed locally to be rolled out to schools across the borough. This would help to educate the young people within the borough who would then pass this on to the rest of their families.</p>	<p>The interactive games that were used at the recycling centre were fun to play but also very informative. This would be a good way of educating children who could then educate their parents and other relatives.</p>	<p>Research if there is anything produced by GMWDA that could be used.</p> <p>GMWDA has interactive games on its website – ask schools to look at these.</p> <p>Consider holding a Recycling week at schools across the borough where the pupils come up with their own interactive games based on the GMWDA - best game is rolled out across all schools in the borough.</p>	<p>From Sept 2013</p>	<p>Talat Afzal</p>	<p>This would promote recycling and get all schools involved.</p> <p>Invite Councillors to help out with this in the schools that they are Governors.</p> <p>On line games have been developed by Viridor and are available on the R4GM website. All schools have access to this resource. Schools have been signposted to the website as have recycling champions. Recycling education in schools ongoing as the recycling initiative is rolled out to all schools. All schools to be recycling by end November 2013.</p> <p>The Cabinet report referred to above includes reference to the establishment of an Officer to work in schools on an ongoing basis promoting recycling.</p>
<p>Rec 10</p> <p>That all Councillors are encouraged to attend a visit to the Customer Contact Centre.</p>	<p>This highlights the issues that the contact centre are dealing with and shows the Councillors how issues are progressed.</p>	<p>Invite Councillors to attend scheduled visits when they can be given a tour of the centre and receive an introduction before sitting in and listening to telephone calls as they are received.</p>	<p>ongoing</p>	<p>Michelle Bracegirdle</p>	<p>All councillors have been invited to attend the centre and this is being carried out on a rolling basis.</p> <p>The Councillors attend a presentation and are then able to sit with a call centre operative listening in to calls being received.</p> <p>Lists of Councillors who have attended are available.</p>

Recommendation	Reason	Steps involved	When	Lead	Progress
<p>Rec 11</p> <p>That all funding opportunities in relation to the promotion of recycling are researched and applied for.</p>					<p>This is already done as demonstrated by the successful application for EU LIFE+ funding by the GMWDA on behalf of the GM Waste Partnership. All opportunities for funding are monitored on an ongoing basis.</p>



REPORT FOR DECISION



DECISION OF:	Cabinet Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	Wednesday, 18th September 2013 Tuesday, 8th October 2013
SUBJECT:	Corporate Plan Progress Report – Quarter 1 2013-14
REPORT FROM:	Leader of the Council
CONTACT OFFICER:	Sarah Marshall, Performance Officer – Adults Planning
TYPE OF DECISION:	Non key decision
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION/STATUS:	This paper is within the public domain
SUMMARY:	The Corporate Plan Progress Report outlines the progress during quarter one 2013-14 for the corporate performance indicators and projects within the Bury Council Corporate Plan. The information is extracted from the Performance Information Management System (PIMS) and provided by the responsible services.
OPTIONS & RECOMMENDED OPTION	The Cabinet and Committee are asked to note the contents of the report.
IMPLICATIONS:	
Corporate Aims/Policy Framework:	Do the proposals accord with the Policy Framework? Yes
Statement by the S151 Officer: Financial Implications and Risk Considerations:	There are no direct financial implications arising from this monitoring report. The report outlines the current forecast outturn position based upon data available at Quarter 1. Likewise the report highlights the Corporate Risk Register as at Quarter 1.
Statement by Executive Director of Resources:	There are no other direct resource implications arising from this report.
Equality/Diversity implications:	Yes An Equality Analysis was undertaken for the Bury Council Corporate Plan 2012-15 and it was concluded that the Plan has a positive impact by aiming to reduce poverty and inequality. This report provides a summary of the progress made.
Considered by Monitoring Officer:	Yes JH
Wards Affected:	All
Scrutiny Interest:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee

TRACKING/PROCESS

DIRECTOR: Executive Director, ACS

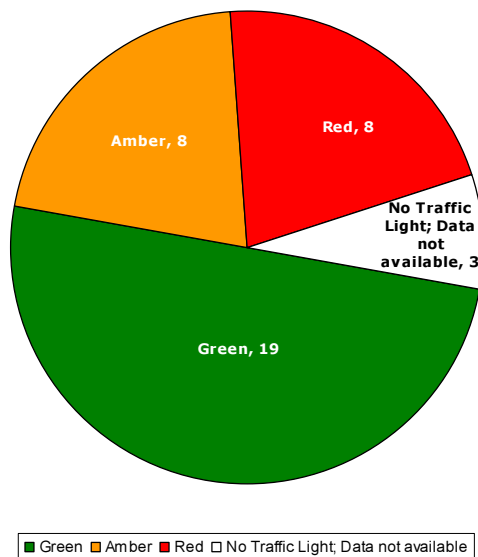
Chief Executive/ Strategic Leadership Team	Cabinet Member/Chair	Ward Members	Partners
02/09/13			
Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet/Committee	Council	
08/10/13	18/09/13		

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 The council publishes a Corporate Plan each year with progress updates reported to Cabinet each quarter. This report outlines performance against the plan for quarter 1 2013-14.

2.0 SUMMARY

2.1 There is evidence of a good start to 2013-14:



2.2 Of the 53 corporate performance indicators detailed in the corporate plan, 38 of these have outcomes for quarter 1 on which we can report as some are collected annually. 19 indicators (50%) have demonstrated an improvement on the out turn for 2012-13 and/or exceeded the target set for this year and 8 indicators (represented as amber on the chart) have just fallen short of meeting our expectations. Considering the financial situation and other challenges facing services, this level of performance at the beginning of the year is positive and demonstrates the potential to meet the high standards we set ourselves as a Council by year end.

2.3 8 areas under achieved:

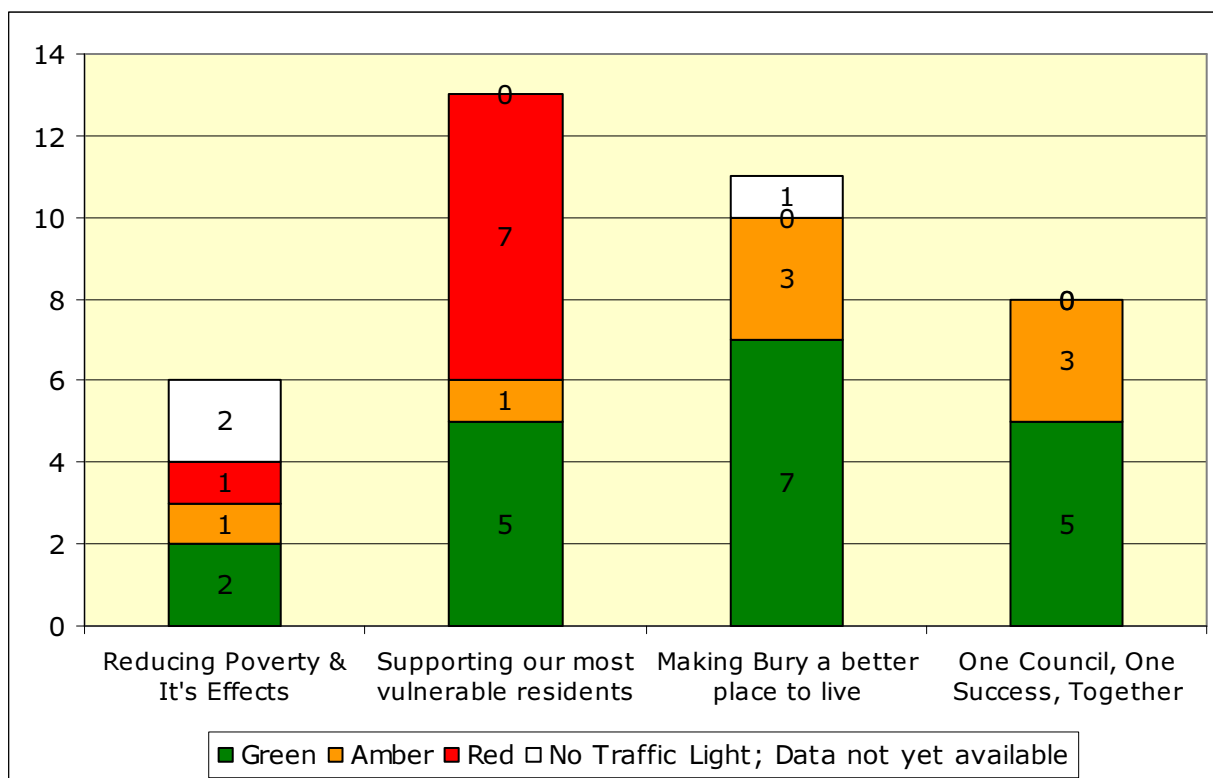
- 5 of these indicators have not produced the expected outcome due to changes to working practice. More challenging assessments have been introduced to identify achievement at Key Stage 2 for ethnic minority groups and children on free school meals. The introduction of personalised

social care packages has meant it is taking more time to complete the assessments and put these into practice so the targets for timescales have not been met. It is expected that this will be improved upon and the target will be achieved by year end.

- The number of households living in temporary accommodation is 50% above target but is expected to reduce over the course of the year as the service is now discharging the Council’s homelessness duty in the private sector, reducing the reliance on social housing for resettlement.
- 66.7% of children and young people in care were placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision and who remained in that placement. This figure is based on a small cohort (3), a better representation of performance against this indicator should be available at year end as the cohort group will have increased.
- 1 indicator is outside of our control to influence the performance management. The percentage of children becoming the subject of a Child Protection Plan is above the target set.

2.4 There are 3 indicators where progress cannot be analysed, which is an improvement upon last year. Data from external sources has not been available to calculate these outcomes for quarter 1. Work is ongoing to review the data set for future Corporate Plans so that non-reporting is minimised and the results selected provide a fair and meaningful reflection of the Council’s position.

2.5 Analysing the results by the Council’s priority outcomes, some progress is being made across all four areas:



2.6 At this early stage outcomes for supporting our most vulnerable residents face the greatest challenge. Efforts are being made to improve the position over the coming year. A more accurate picture will emerge over the next two quarters as more information becomes available.

3.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The report provides details of the progress made at quarter one 2013-14.
- 3.2 Overall, performance against the corporate plan indicates a mixed picture with 19 out of 38 (50%) of indicators achieving target and/or performing better than last year. In the context of current pressures and resource limitations, some deterioration in performance may be expected. Where we have not performed as planned, the reasons have been identified and in most cases a proactive approach has been adopted to improve these outcomes throughout this year.
- 3.3 It is recommended that Cabinet accept the report and note the actions being taken to address areas of under achievement against targets.

List of Background Papers:-

Bury Council Corporate Plan 2013-16

Contact Details:- Sarah Marshall, Performance Officer – Adults Planning

Tel: 0161 253 7658

Email: s.marshall@bury.gov.uk

One Council. One Plan.

Quarter One 2013-14:

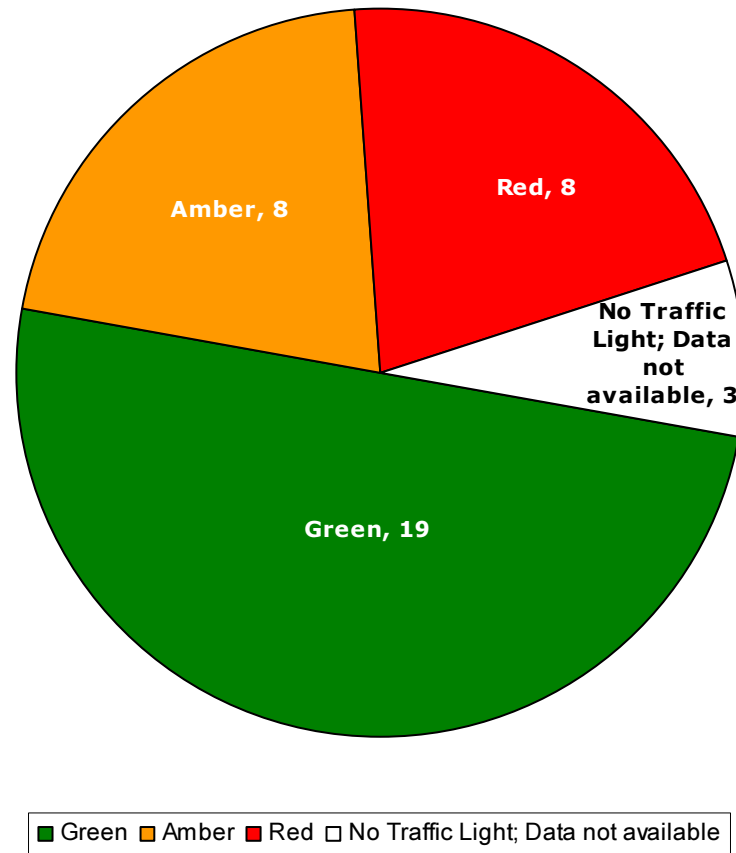
Progress Report

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report outlines progress during quarter one of 2013-14 for the corporate performance indicators and projects within the Bury Council Corporate Plan. The information provided is extracted from the Performance Information Management System (PIMS) and the responsible services.
- 1.2 There are currently 53 performance indicators from PIMS and 25 projects within the Corporate Plan. This report provides a summary of the overall performance of all indicators and projects.
- 1.3 Where data are unavailable for Quarter 1 2013-14, the report provides the latest inputted data from previous quarters.
- 1.4 Throughout this report the definitions of the colour-coding are:
 - Green – On target and/or better than 2012-13 performance
 - Amber – Within 15% of achieving target or within 15% of 2012-13 performance
 - Red – Below target or worse than we achieved in 2012-13.
 - No Traffic Light – Information not available due to various reasons.
- 1.5 The detail of this corporate performance report can be viewed or downloaded on the corporate performance information monitoring system (PIMS). If you require copies of the reports or need training on the operation of the monitoring system; *please contact Benjamin Imafidon on Ext 6592.*

SUMMARY

2.1 Overall the council currently reports performance against a total of 53 corporate performance indicators. For quarter 1, outcomes for 38 of these indicators were collected as some indicators are reported annually. The chart below shows the percentage of these performance indicators that are categorised as Red, Amber and Green using the criteria set out in paragraph 1.4.



Reducing Poverty and Its Effects

Current Performance

Performance Indicators

Measure	Higher/ lower is better	2012/13 Baseline	2013/14 Q1	Target	Commentary
Overall employment rate for Bury (working age)	Higher	75.2%	77.8% (Green)	70%	Bury's outcome for this indicator is 6.4% higher than Greater Manchester (71.4%). Bury Employment and Skills Task Group are working to maintain this gap.
Working age people on out of work benefits (percentage difference between Bury and Greater Manchester)	Lower	2%	1.9% (Green)	1.6%	Recent information published by New Economy shows that the proportion of working age people on out of work benefits is 16% in Bury and 17.9% in Greater Manchester. Partnership work is ongoing through Bury Employment and Skills Task Group to both influence provision locally and engage with businesses established and incoming to employ our unemployed residents.
Percentage of working age people claiming out of work benefits in the worst performing neighbourhoods	Lower	Not available	Not available	32%	Unable to obtain data at lower super output area level.
Proportion of population aged 19-64 for males and 19-59 for females qualified to at least Level 2 or higher	Higher	Not available	Not available	70%	Unable to provide data, statistics do not get recorded by Skills Funding Agency and not readily available. This is to be reviewed.
Proportion of children in poverty	Lower	18.31	Not available	21.09	This is an annual indicator and will be reported at year end. The Q4 outcome is from 2010.
Achievement gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and	Lower	16%	18.2% (Red)	15%	The achievement gap has increased by 0.6% from last year but these results are still

their peers achieving the expected level at Key Stage 2					provisional and subject to change. This may be due to the introduction of new more challenging assessments. National results for comparisons will be available in Q3.
Inequality gap in the achievement of a Level 3 qualification by the age of 19	Lower	18%	Not available	28%	This is an annual indicator and will be reported at year end.
Achievement gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers achieving the expected level at Key Stage 4	Lower	23.2%	Not available	22%	Results will be available by Q3.
Percentage of 16-18 year olds by academic age who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)	Lower	5.5%	6.1% (Amber)	6.4%	The Q1 NEET figure represents a 0.7% improvement on June 12. This is especially encouraging given that once again the 'currency' rules around the NEET cohort have been changed with NEET young people no longer able to lapse in to not known after 3 months. In theory this should increase the NEET cohort so a reduced % is a significant achievement.

Project Updates

Poverty Strategy

The monitoring process for the poverty strategy was instigated this quarter. Work is ongoing between the Welfare Reform Project Board (WRPB), responsible officers and the performance monitoring officer to ensure the good efforts made as a result of the strategy are appropriately represented. The WRPB are considering specific outcomes to monitor and track the impact of poverty in Bury, this will include the demand on Citizens Advice Bureau services, food parcels and financial support claims. Developments through partnership working are evident in the progress made by the Health and Wellbeing Board, Bury Community Learning Partnership, the Children and Young People's plan and the development of our Corporate Debt Policy with Six Town Housing. The impact of welfare reform has been addressed through Barclays Money Skills, Community Access to Advice, Bury Support Fund and Credit Union.

Homelessness Strategy

The refresh of the Homelessness Strategy is progressing well. Consultation on the draft documents is expected later this year. The Housing Education and New Opportunities (HEN) Project commenced in February. There are currently 28 people accommodated on this scheme and there have been a number of successes in terms of service users attending training courses and obtaining employment both paid and voluntary. The service users have also received health screening and there has been an improvement in

many of the service user's health and well being.

The Cold Weather provision was again successful over the winter period. A new provider has been commissioned to work with rough sleepers focusing on a street rescue model so that no rough sleeper experiences a second night on the streets.

Affordable Warmth

The action plan is currently under review awaiting the development of the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy which is due to be published this year. However there is continued delivery of the strategy's key aims with internal and external partners including:

- Bury Healthy Homes Scheme 2012/13

To complete last year's scheme a further 262 winter warmth packs were delivered to applicants who were unable to collect them in person (which makes 986 packs in total being given out) and a review of the scheme is in progress. 4 training sessions have been booked for November on energy related topics for frontline staff, to equip them with recognising fuel poverty with vulnerable Bury residents who may need assistance keeping warm and well this winter.

- Collective GM Energy Switching Scheme

A second auction was carried out on the 09/04/13 with 1061 Bury residents signing up to switch supplier. Those residents who decided to switch both gas and electricity saved on average £119 per household. GM is undertaking an evaluation on the first two auctions and is considering a third one in October 2013.

- GM ECO Toasty Scheme 2013/14

Bury is working with Carillion, a procured Energy Company Obligation (ECO) partner (in advance of the GM Green Deal scheme going live from Jan 14) to provide residents with free or heavily subsidised home energy efficiency improvements, using ECO funding both across the Borough and in 4 targeted areas. The scheme has started to be promoted in Bury and the first 2 target areas of Bury East and Moorside, and Carillion have already undertaken 10 surveys. The inclusion of a target to promote the scheme in the Township Forums Local Area Plans has also been successfully negotiated.

In general Urban Renewal continues to work closely with the GM Energy Advice Service by way of attendance at meetings and their involvement in the above schemes.

Backing Young Bury

The Connecting Provision Activity is an innovative model using all locally funded provision and shaping it into one offer for young people who are the furthest from securing employment. This model works with those young people who have the greatest barriers in order to gain the biggest impact in the community as well as the biggest savings in the future. It includes, Troubled Families, Sportivate, ESF Complex Families, Adult Learning Provision, Work Programme Providers and Jobcentre Plus. By working with priority

groups Bury Council is able to draw down Youth Contract and GM Commitment Grants to recycle into further activity.

Council Tax Support Scheme

The new Council Tax Support scheme was introduced in Bury on 1st April 2013. The funding the council receives from the Government has been reduced by 10%. Whilst councils were free to design their own schemes the Government regulated that pensioners could not be worse off after 1st April.

The main feature of Bury's scheme is a restriction on the maximum amount of support a household can receive to the Council Tax amount charged for a Band B property. This measure affected 800 residents. Early indications are that collection rates for residents affected by the new scheme are similar to other charge payers.

It is worth noting that the Council Support caseload is changing all the time, with households coming off benefits and others making new claims. Therefore reductions in support may only be experienced for a short time.

Local Social Fund Replacement (*Bury Support Fund*)

The Bury Support Fund commenced 2nd April 2013. A steady flow of claims have been received from the start with food parcels and pre-payment cards being used to support customers. It has and will continue to be a huge learning curve for all concerned.

As the scheme has settled in we are starting to look at the types of requests we receive; over the next few months we will review the scheme criteria and those services we support and address any areas that need to be altered. We continually need to ensure that targeted help and support is going to the right people at the right time.

In Q1 we have found that most crisis applications appear to be due to DWP delays where customers are without resources for a certain period of time. Customers are being asked to approach the DWP processing centre to request Short Term Benefit Advances and Hardship payments where appropriate. This has been addressed with the DWP but continues to be a drain on our limited resources.

A CAB Bury Support Fund Adviser has joined the team to assist us with debt and budgeting advice for those customers who have unsuccessful support fund applications, those affected by under occupancy and those who are struggling to pay their bills. This ensures that we are not just dealing with the short term need of a crisis we are also working with the customer to achieve and meet long term challenges.

Supporting our most vulnerable residents

Current Performance

Performance Indicators

Measure	Higher/ lower is better	2012/13 Baseline	2013/14 Q1	Target	Commentary
Percentage achieving independence: older people through rehabilitation/ intermediate care	Higher	93.5%	81.7% (Amber)	80%	Due to the prevention services in place less people are admitted to hospital.
Adults with learning disabilities in settled accommodation	Higher	85.7%	86.1% (Green)	80%	We continue to ensure customers with a learning disability are in settled accommodation due to joint working between the learning disability team, health and social care and housing.
Adults with learning disabilities in employment	Higher	40%	39% (Green)	35%	This years target has been set at 35. Whilst we are ahead of target in quarter 1, the jobs market can fluctuate throughout the year.
Number of households living in temporary accommodation	Lower	12	15 (Red)	10	It is expected that the number of households in temporary accommodation will reduce due to the introduction of discharging duty in the private sector which means we no longer rely exclusively on social housing for resettling households.
Percentage of social care assessments completed within 28 days	Higher	83.6%	66.2% (Red)	78%	Behind on this target due to the increased time taken to complete personalised assessments, but we aim is to achieve the target by year end as this has been achieved in previous years.
Percentage of social care packages in place 28 days after assessment	Higher	77.5%	42.6% (Red)	60%	It has been harder to achieve this target due to the increased time taken to get support in place when it is personalised.

					This has now been removed as a national indicator but we continue to monitor it locally.
Social Care clients receiving Self Directed Support (Direct payments and individual budgets)	Higher	30.7%	59.9% (Green)	55%	This indicator has improved due to an amendment to the cohort group. The target has been set locally and work continues to increase this figure.
Carers receiving needs assessment or review and a specific carer's service, or advice and information	Higher	16.6%	6.7% (Green)	25%	This is a cumulative target and we are on track for meeting it by year end.
The percentage of children and young people in care adopted during the year who were placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision that they should be placed for adoption, and who remained in that placement on adoption.	Higher	77.3%	66.7% (Red)	80%	Year to date: 2 out of 3 (66.7%)
Percentage of children becoming the subject of Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time	Lower	12.3%	25.7% (Red)	17%	Of the 70 Bury plans that commenced between April and June inclusive, 18 (25.7%) are repeats. The provisional 2013-2014 figure puts us in one of the "Investigate urgently" PAF A3 bands (24% or above).
The percentage of children and young people in care achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs (or equivalent) at key stage 4 (including English & Maths)	Higher	13.6%	Not available	50%	This is an annual indicator and will be reported at quarter 2.
Percentage gap between pupils with Special Educational Needs and their peers achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths	Lower	49.2%	Not available	44%	This is an annual indicator and will be reported at quarter 3.

Key Stage 2 attainment for Black and minority ethnic groups: Pakistani Heritage	Lower	4.7%	4.3% (Green)	3%	The gap has decreased so although we have not met target there has been improvement.
Key Stage 2 attainment for Black and minority ethnic groups: Mixed White and Black Caribbean	Lower	-10.9%	8.7% (Red)	5%	These results are provisional. Due to more challenging assessments the gap has increased. National comparisons will be available in quarter 3. Care has to be taken when looking at these figures because of the cohort size of 29 pupils out of 2061 for year 6.
Key Stage 2 attainment for Black and minority ethnic groups: White Other	Lower	9.4%	13.9% (Red)	9%	Due to more challenging assessments this indicator gap has increased by 4.5%. National data will be available for comparison in quarter 3.
Percentage of pupils permanently excluded from school in the year	Lower	0.16% (Green)	Not available	0.22%	This is an annual indicator and will be reported at quarter 2.

Project Updates

Supporting Communities, Improving Lives

Following a review of progress and subsequent conversations with the DCLG team who are funding the programme, work is underway to refresh the data, strengthen the governance framework and accelerate work with families that meet the criteria. The national team has expressed satisfaction with our plans going forward and the level of strategic support that exists; the priority for the next quarter is operational - mobilising the plan to deliver successful outcomes to more families.

Extra Care Housing

Two bids were submitted to the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) for the Care & Support Specialised Housing Fund. The results of these bids were announced in July 2013. The bid by St Vincent's Housing Association to develop a scheme on Danesmoor Road has been successful; a significant achievement considering the large number of bids in the region. Unfortunately, the Six Town Housing bid to develop a larger scheme, similar to Red Bank in Radcliffe was unsuccessful at this stage. Officers from the Council and Six Town Housing will continue to work together to ensure this scheme is well placed to pick any 'slippage' funding from the HCA and to explore alternative ways of financing this much-needed scheme.

Red Bank in Radcliffe continues to operate successfully, recently celebrating its first birthday, with a coffee and cakes afternoon for residents and guests. Falcon and Griffin flats remain popular after the improvement works there.

Housing Allocation Policy

The new allocations policy has been implemented and in operation since the beginning of May 2013.

Day Opportunities

Development of the Clarence Park Day Service is ongoing. We are currently out to tender for the building work to commence in quarter 3 and due to complete in quarter 4. Upon completion the new day service will include a community café facility which will offer training and work experience opportunities to people with disabilities.

Great Places Housing Group is to develop a new day care centre on the site of Hazlehurst. This will replace the services previously available at Whittle Pike and other facilities in the borough.

Early Intervention Strategy

A S188 has just been completed which disestablished the Early Intervention Service and proposed to establish an Early Help Team. Selection processes have begun to identify some members of this new team. Other roles will be advertised soon.

A development group is being set up with partners to agree Terms of Reference for the new Early Help Panel, and to agree actions around developing this. Work is ongoing to establish a multi-agency safeguarding hub which will involve all key partners.

New Horizons Programme

The New Horizons Programme continued to support eleven learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to further develop their life skills. An annual evaluation report of progress during the 2012/13 academic year and figures for the number of new learners for 2013/14 will be reported at Quarter 2.

Making Bury a better place to live

Current Performance

Performance Indicators

Measure	Higher/ lower is better	2012/13 Baseline	2013/14 Q1	Target	Commentary
Visits in person to Galleries/Museum per 1,000 population	Higher	235.01	66.04 (Green)	241	In the first quarter there were 12139 visitors. This is a cumulative indicator and currently based on mid 2011 population figures. This figure is higher than at quarter 1 last year. Full year results will be re-calculated at year end on mid 2012 population figures.
Percentage of household waste sent for re use, recycling and composting	Higher	44.85%	45% (Green)	44%	This figure is an estimate and will be confirmed following audited tonnages from the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority.
Residual household waste - kgs per household	Lower	450.5kg	120kg (Amber)	445kg	This figure is an estimate and will be confirmed following audited tonnages from the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority.
The percentage of urban and countryside parks, based on the ISPAL definition, that have achieved "green flag" status	Higher	85.71%	Not available	85.71%	This is an annual indicator and will be reported at year end. All parks have been mystery shopped.
Percentage of adults participating in at least 30 minutes moderate intensity sport and active recreation on three or more days a week	Higher	23.6%	23.6% (Amber)	25.5%	Annual data reported in Q3 APS7 (Active People Survey) mid to late October 13
Number of serious violent crimes per 1,000 population	Lower	0.52	0.10 (Green)	0.88	During quarter 1 19 incidents of serious violent crime were reported.
Number of serious acquisitive	Lower	11.43	2.53	12.95	During quarter 1 469 incidents of serious

crimes per 1,000 population			(Green)		acquisitive crime were reported.
Assault with injury crime rate per 1,000 of the population	Lower	5.78	2.19 (Green)	6.25	During quarter 1 407 incidents of assault were recorded.
Reduction in the number of incidents of anti-social behaviour as measured by the National Codes for Incidences (NICL)	Lower	44.52	12.10 (Amber)	46.2	During quarter 1 2241 incidents of anti-social behaviour were reported.
Percentage rate of repeat incidents of domestic violence	Lower	29.26%	34.15% (Green)	40%	During quarter 1 14 repeat cases were discussed at the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).
Number of first-time entrants (FTEs) to the Youth Justice system aged 10-17 (Rate per 100,000)	Lower	637	Not available	536.95	This is an annual indicator and will be reported at year end. The target set reflects the England average.
Prevalence of breastfeeding at 6 to 8 weeks	Higher	98.42%	100% (Green)	97.20%	Much effort has gone into getting this rate up to 100%. We do monthly reports throughout the quarter to identify any gaps and make sure we get complete statuses for the babies input on the Child Health system in a timely manner. This is done by working with the health visiting team and checking the records of the babies to make sure they are input onto the Child Health system. Data sourced from Pennine Care quarter 1 Breastfeeding Return.
Rate of alcohol-related hospital admissions per 100,000 population (DSR)	Lower	2067	Not available	1879	Data currently unavailable to Public Health Team due to development of new data warehouse at Greater Manchester Commissioning Support Unit (GMCSU).
Percentage of the local authority principal road networks ('A' roads) where structural maintenance should be considered	Lower	3%	Not available	10%	This is an annual indicator and will be reported at year end.
Percentage of the local authority non principal classified road networks ('B' and 'C' roads) where	Lower	3%	Not available	10%	This is an annual indicator and will be reported at year end.

structural maintenance should be considered					
Increased number of tourist visitors (STEAM)	Higher	5,404,130	Not available	5,315,516	This is an annual indicator and will be reported at quarter 3.
Supply of ready to develop housing sites	Higher	100%	Not available	100%	This is an annual indicator and will be reported at year end.
CO2 reduction from local authority operations	Higher	9%	Not available	16%	This is an annual indicator and will be reported at quarter 2.
Visits in person to libraries per thousand population	Higher	5,384 (Amber)	Not available	5,300	This is an annual indicator and will be reported at quarter 3.

Project Updates

Health Reform

Work still continues on the Health & Well-Being Strategy. Priorities for the Health & Well-Being Strategy and the Health & Well-Being Board are being developed and will form part of the work that is ongoing. Feedback from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the asset approach will improve and inform commissioning intentions for the future.

We have successfully recruited to Healthwatch Chair and Vice Chair: Chair: Andrew Ramwell and Vice Chair: Carol Twist, who will be working with the Project Board to establish Healthwatch.

Increase recycling, reuse and composting

Food waste recycling from school kitchens and Council buildings continues to be rolled out, as do on-street recycling bins. Recycling performance largely stabilised at the moment, in the absence of significant new initiatives. Small, seasonal variations with garden waste tonnages collected. Very difficult, if not impossible, to quantify the impact of promotional campaigns, given other variables at play and the absence of a control.

New health and social care partnership with Bury Football Club

The partnership has focused it's approach on inclusion and improving the quality of life for the local community, developing an action plan which focuses on achieving the following outcomes:

- Increasing levels of physical activity
- Engage communities in their own health and develop their capacity to support individual behaviour change for healthier lifestyles
- Engage with socially excluded groups through sport encouraging healthy choices and reduce health inequalities
- Promote a positive and healthy environment

These outcomes will be met through a range of activities including; girl's football, Buggy Boot Camp, Memory Lane – Dementia Café

and Healthy Stadia. Number of participants has increased across the activities contributing to better outcomes and the partnership aims to maintain this level of participation in 2013-14. With the season starting in July 2013 we will get an indication of the impact these activities may have on participants following Bury FCs quarter 1 analysis in September 2013.

Empty properties

- Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) funding for empty properties

8 empty properties have been identified so far where the owners wish to sell thus potentially exceeding the target of 4 for the second year of delivery. Discussions have taken place with the HCA who are happy for Bury's target to be exceeded in line with the wider AGMA programme. As part of a second AGMA wide bid, Bury has been successful in securing further HCA funding of at least £690,000 to bring a further 13 empty residential properties back into use and 1 commercial premises.

- Radcliffe Empty Property Pilot

A series of meetings have taken place with Six Town Housing, Property Services and Legal to further develop the business case and working procedures. The business case for the first 5 empty properties will be complete by the end June for internal sign-off. A further 4 empty properties have already been identified and Urban Renewal has started to put together the business cases for them. A draft Local Economic Benefit report has been produced which sets out how any local supply chains and employment/training opportunities will be developed/managed.

- Empty property grants

The first of the 6 grants in Radcliffe has been successfully completed. Surveys on the other 5 have been carried out and are progressing through the grants process.

Registry Office Annual Performance Report

The annual performance report was completed for 2012/13 and demonstrated good performance (95% and above) for registering births and deaths within the timescales set. Bury Registry Office received 100% customer satisfaction through their survey responses. Key performance indicators for quarter 1 show that this good performance has continued into the beginning of 2013/14 as most outcomes reflect or exceed national and regional performance.

Investment in LED (light emitting diode) lighting

The contract for producing the LED lights went out to tender and a supplier has successfully been secured. Over the next quarter, meetings will take place to establish a design process and we expect to place the first order for Bury's new efficient lighting as part of a phased roll out to improve the quality of street lighting in the borough. We have already obtained a batch of column extensions to convert our 5 metre columns into 6 metres. As a scheme has already been successfully implemented using these, we are confident in their suitability for roll out across the Borough when they are required.

Streetsafe Strategy

The introduction of 20mph speed limits is being carried out as a series of individual schemes in areas defined by their boundaries with key routes. Twelve schemes (two in each of the Borough's six townships) have been the subject of informal consultations which have seen the delivery of information packages to over 8,000 residential properties. Details of each consultation have also appeared on the Council's StreetSafe website at www.bury.gov.uk/streetsafe which has been launched to provide up-to-date information about the strategy.

The Road Safety Team have promoted the wider aims of the StreetSafe strategy by offering introductory cycle training to Year 4 (ages 8-9) classes within the Borough. Level 1 (off-road) national standards cycle training was delivered to approximately 417 pupils from 25 different schools. This was delivered alongside our normal programme of Level 2 (on-road) national standards cycle training with Year 5 and 6 children (ages 9-11).

Remodelling of the library service

At the July 10th 2013 Cabinet meeting the phase 2 proposals regarding the remodelling of the Library Service were discussed and a way forward was agreed. Community hubs are still important both for the Library Service and the Council, but they will now be progressed more widely during the roll-out of the corporate Asset Management Strategy. To achieve the required £570,000 savings in 2014/2015, the Library Service will restructure, with a reduction in the staffing establishment and in sundry budgets. RFID (Radio Frequency Identification), a system whereby customers can self serve for the loaning of resources and paying fines, is currently in procurement for phase 1 (Bury Library), whilst for phase 2 (7 further libraries) RFID will be formally discussed with staff in the near future.

Developing visitor attractions and economic development opportunities

The first quarter has seen the continuation of tourism development activity on the successful 'East Lancashire Railway Experience Project'. The key objectives are to capitalise on the existing visitor offer through rebranding and marketing and also to develop new products. Examples of activity include extending some of the project's major successes so far such as the Rail Ale Trail, joint marketing campaigns, a visitor guide and new initiatives linking with local businesses. The project has also delivered a major research initiative resulting in much needed visitor information and analysis.

Joint activity has also been undertaken with outside bodies such as TFGM /Metrolink to attract increased visitor numbers and with Marketing Manchester linking into themed campaigns for GM. Other projects delivered include the development of a new Bury Town Centre Visitor Attraction leaflet to position Bury town centre attractions as a destination and an increased focus on the coach market with online marketing and the expansion of the coach meet and greet service. Activity also supports the ongoing wider tourism development work to enhance the overall visitor product and attractions offer.

Latest STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) figures, which allows us to measure trends in tourism activity for the borough, have demonstrated the following for 2012.

- An increase in the number of stays in hotels and guest accommodation increased by 19%
- An increase of 3% in numbers employed in tourism activity to 4074.
- Visitor spend in the borough rose from £289m in 2011 to just over £302m in 2012

Adoption of the Local Plan Core Strategy

Following consultation on the Second Draft Publication Core Strategy in October/November 2012, comments have been considered, evidence has been updated and a final Publication version of the document is being prepared.

One Council, One Success, Together Current Performance

Finance Summary

Department	Budget £000	Forecast £000	Variance £000
Adult Care Services	52,745	52,841	+96
Chief Executives	4,569	5,265	+696
Children's Services	31,888	32,334	+446
Communities & Neighbourhoods	35,545	35,906	+361
Non-Service Specific	22,979	22,249	-730
TOTAL	147,726	148,595	+869

The quarter 1 forecasted over spend of **£0.869m** represents approximately **0.5%** of the total net budget of £147,726m.

Performance Indicators

Measure	Higher/ lower is better	2011/12 Baseline	2012/13 Q4	Target	Commentary
Percentage Council Tax collected	Higher	97.33%	28.68% (Amber)	96.5%	Slightly down on last year's percentage but this is to be expected with the changes to Council Tax Services. The amount of cash collected is up on last year.
Percentage of business rates	Higher	93.93%	32.3%	96%	Collection during quarter 1 has been steady

collected			(Green)		and the quarterly target (32%) has been met.
Average time taken in calendar days to process Housing Benefit/Council Tax new claims and change events	Lower	23.67	23.20 (Green)	26	Excellent start to the year as performance is well within target.
Forecast outturn (Revenue) (council -wide) (£million)	Lower	-£0.093	+£0.869 (Amber)	£0	Forecasted overspend of 0.5% of total budget.
Forecast outturn (Capital) (council -wide) (£million)	Lower	£0	+£0.089 (Amber)	£0	Minor overspend due to timing differences between costs being incurred, and capital receipts being generated.
Governance issues reported (council - wide)	Lower	0	0 (Green)	0	No significant governance issues reported.
Number of FTE days lost due to sickness absence	Lower	9.42	9.41 (Green)	9.2	Although this indicator has not reached target there has been an improvement upon last year.
Percentage of employees satisfied with Bury Council as an employer	Higher	Not available	Not available	75%	There has been no full survey this year to measure this. Although we have run 6 engagers surveys this specific question is only asked on the three yearly survey
Percentage staff turnover (council - wide)	Lower	2.80%	2.06% (Green)	No target	The outturn for this quarter is stable and there has been an improvement upon last years performance.

Project Updates

Plan for Change

We are currently assessing the future demand and needs of our residents and how, building on the energies and commitment and skills and abilities of our staff, we can continue to ensure services are delivered in a changing world. We consulted for 6 weeks on proposals for changes to the Library Service which were reported to Cabinet in July 2013.

Accommodation Review

Despite the short timescales, the vacation of Athenaeum House and Castle Buildings remains on target to be achieved by the end of August. The rationalisation of accommodation used by staff within the Chief Executive's department has now been completed and the first of the teams within Adult Care Services relocated to the Town Hall. Similarly, Department of Communities and Neighbourhoods staff moves within 3 Knowsley Place have now been completed to enable Children's Services to move in.

People Strategy

- The new structure for the HR and OD Team is now in place (incorporating Departmental HR for Chief Executive's Department, Employee Relations, Emergency Planning, Business Support, Management Support, Health and Safety, Learning and Development, HR Information Systems, Policy Development, Equality and Diversity, Recruitment and Contracts and Workforce Planning)
- The Public Health Team has transferred to the council and HR issues have been supported
- The car allowance and car parking review has taken place and has been implemented
- Our Bury Behaviours have been approved and supported by SLT and Cabinet. They are about to be launched.
- We have a series of health and safety promotions in place
- We have introduced a new audit procedure for the health and safety of our organisation and our employees
- A revised Emergency Planning Initial Responder Reference Guide has been issued
- We now have 11 Union Learner Representatives within the organisation and through the Joint Learning Forum are setting up a project to look at Digital Inclusion
- We had a new cohort of Backing Young Bury apprentices starting in May
- We held a Mock Council for Elected Member Development and continued to deliver our formal training days
- We have revised and relaunched our mediation service
- We have developed a timetable for updated policies in next 12 months
- We have further developed our employee benefits
- We have launched the Children's Services Management Development Programme
- We have launched the Plan for Change support package.

Risk

Risk management is a systematic approach to assessing risks and opportunities surrounding achievement of core strategic, departmental and operational objectives. The council has a well established approach to risk management which assesses the likelihood and potential impact of a wide range of risks & opportunities. Risk Registers are compiled for all activities and projects, and are subject to review on a quarterly basis. Risk Registers are reported to all levels of management, and to elected members.

The following risks / opportunities have been identified that the council faces in meeting its own priorities and in contributing towards the council's corporate priorities and community ambitions:

Ref	Risk Event	Risk Owner	Impact (New)	Likelihood (New)	Quarter 1 Status	Quarter 2 Status	Quarter 3 Status	Quarter 4 Status	Measures
1	The <u>potential</u> liability facing the Council in respect of Equal Pay significantly weakens the Council's financial position	Mike Owen / Guy Berry	2	1	2 green				Risk substantially addressed as most cases have now been settled. To remain on register till exercise complete.
2	There is no robust financial strategy or change management strategy to address effectively the significant funding reductions that the Council faces over the next 3 years and beyond in order to ensure there is a sustainable and balanced budget	Steve Kenyon	3	2	6 amber				Risk mitigated as balanced budget is in place for 2013/14, and significant savings options have been identified for 2014/15. These actions are counterbalanced by uncertainty around Comprehensive Spending Review (June 2013); hence scores remain unchanged. Impact of CSR to be reported

									when analysed.
3	The budget strategy fails to address the Council's priorities and emerging issues, e.g. demographic and legislative changes	Mike Owen/Steve Kenyon	3	2	6 amber				Income pressures largely addressed in 2013/14 budget. Demand pressures remain a risk and will be monitored / managed through Star Chamber process.
4	The budget strategy does not reflect, or respond to, national policy developments, e.g. Council Tax Support scheme and changes to the Business Rates regime	Mike Owen/Steve Kenyon	4	3	12 red				Monitoring arrangements in place – to be addressed monthly and through Star Chamber process.
5	The Council's asset base is not operated to its maximum effect to deliver efficiency savings and ensure priorities are fulfilled. Ineffective use of assets presents both a financial and a performance risk.	Mike Owen	2	3	6 amber				Asset Management Plan now in place; office accommodation moves taking place Summer 2013.
6	The Council needs to be prepared for the impact of the Localism Act; this presents both opportunities, e.g. power of competency & community right to challenge	Jayne Hammond	2	1	2 green				A process for dealing with applications has been approved by Cabinet; none received to date.
7	The amount of money received from the NHS to manage public health is	Pat Jones-Greenhalgh	3	2	6 green				Settlement now received giving greater certainty; risk remains around performance of contracts

	insufficient to meet the performance outcomes expected by Government								inherited from PCT.
8	The Council fails to manage the expectations of residents, service users & other stakeholders in light of funding reductions	Mike Owen	3	1	3 amber				Widespread consultation took place re: Budget / Plan for Change. Consultation taking place in respect of individual service reviews.
11	The Government's changes to Council Tax Benefit impact adversely upon the Public / Vulnerable People. Also budgetary risk to the Council in the event of claimant numbers rise	Mike Owen	3	3	9 red				Impact on residents being managed through Welfare Reform Board. Budgetary impact to be assessed through monthly monitoring / Star Chamber process.
12	Changes resulting from the wider Welfare reform agenda impact adversely upon the public / vulnerable people.	Mike Owen	3	3	9 red				Welfare Reform Board coordinating action plan with partner organizations (e.g. Six Town, CAB)
13	That the scale and pace of Public Sector reform impacts adversely upon key Council Services, compounded by the loss of capacity following staff leaving the Council (420+ since 2010)	Mike Kelly	4	2	8 red				Workforce Development Plan now in place and individual service workforce plans being developed to ensure continuity / succession planning.

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES
DEPARTMENT**



**ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT
APRIL 2012 – MARCH 2013**

**Jane Whittam
Assistant Team Manager - Information
20 June 2013**

PURPOSE/SUMMARY:

This report has been produced in line with the statutory requirement to update Members and provide current information in respect of complaints related to Children's Social Care Services. This report looks at the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013, and will allow Members to see the extent and complexity of Children's Social Care Service's span of activity and to receive information relating to the quality of the services delivered.

Members are asked to note the content of the report and advise officers of future requirements in respect of the reporting of complaints relating to Children's Social Care Services.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In line with guidance from the Department for Education, Local Authorities are required to publish an Annual Complaints Report covering the council year. This report is to provide current information in respect of complaints related to Children's Social Care Services for the year 2012 / 2013.
- 1.2 As part of our refined approach to monitoring performance, the status of complaints is also reported weekly to the Children's Senior Management Team and monthly to the Children's Services Social Care Performance Group Meeting

2.0 WHAT IS A COMPLAINT

- 2.1 A complaint may be generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet' in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response. A complaint may be made by written or verbal expression.
- 2.2 Complaints principally concern service delivery issues, including the perceived standard of these services and their delivery by service providers. These recorded figures only represent a percentage of complaints received as many complaints/concerns are managed daily on an informal basis operationally and are thus, not registered formally by the complaints section.
- 2.3 The Complaints Procedure is not designed to deal with allegations of serious misconduct by staff. These situations are covered under the separate disciplinary procedures of the Council.
- 2.4 It is a legal requirement that Children's Social Care Services has a distinct complaints procedure. This statutory procedure provides the means for a child or young person to make a complaint about the actions, decisions or apparent failings of a local authority's children social services provision. It also allows an appropriate person to act on behalf of the child or young person concerned or to make a complaint in their own right.
- 2.5 For some service users and for children and young people in particular, it is not easy to make a complaint. This can be the case when the person using the service may be apprehensive about what may happen if they do complain. It is important, therefore, that all complaints are treated seriously, in confidence, investigated and are given due attention. It is therefore the role of the Complaints Co-Ordinator to provide a degree of independence and support to the complainant whilst ensuring the complaint follows the statutory

procedure. If a complaint is received directly from a child or young person, an automatic referral is made for advocate support to Bury Children's Rights Service, which is an independent advocacy service commissioned by Children's Social Care. Feedback to complainants about their complaint is essential.

- 2.6 A prime objective of the Complaints Procedure is to ensure the Local Authority develops a listening and learning culture where learning is fed back to children and young people who use services. Complaints present an opportunity for the Local Authority to learn why people who are using our services find them unsatisfactory, and how we can improve the services we provide.

3.0 THE SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

3.1 The handling and consideration of complaints consists of three stages:-

- Stage 1: Local Resolution,
- Stage 2: Independent Investigation
- Stage 3: Review Panel

3.2 Local Resolution requires the Local Authority to resolve a complaint as close to the point of contact with the service user as possible (i.e. through front line management of the service). Emphasis is placed on resolving complaints under Stage 1, local resolution, because this should provide a more timely response and is user friendly. The Department strives to investigate and resolve complaints within 10 working days although the procedure allows a 20 working day time scale for more complex complaints. In most circumstances complaints are considered at Stage 1 in the first instance.

3.3 Where the complaint is not resolved locally, or the complainant is dissatisfied with the Local Authority's response, the complaint can be considered at Stage 2. An independent investigation is completed by a senior manager from outside the tem to which the complaint refers to. This is overseen by an Independent Person from outside the Local Authority to ensure a full and fair investigation is carried out. We aim to send a response with a full report within 25 working days, although this can be extended to 65 working days.

3.4 Where Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure has been concluded and the complainant is still dissatisfied, they will be eligible to request further consideration of the complaint by a Stage 3 Review Panel. The Panel does not reinvestigate the complaint or consider any substantively new issues of complaint that have not been first considered at Stage 2. The purpose of the Panel is to consider the initial complaint and, wherever possible, work towards a resolution. The Panel should be convened within 30 working days of request and its report (including any recommendations) will be sent within 5 working days following the meeting. The Department then issues its response to the complainant within a further 15 working days.

3.5 Where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the Local Authority's response to the Review Panel's recommendations, the complainant has the right to refer his/her complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Complaints Co-Ordinator will assist with this process as far as possible.

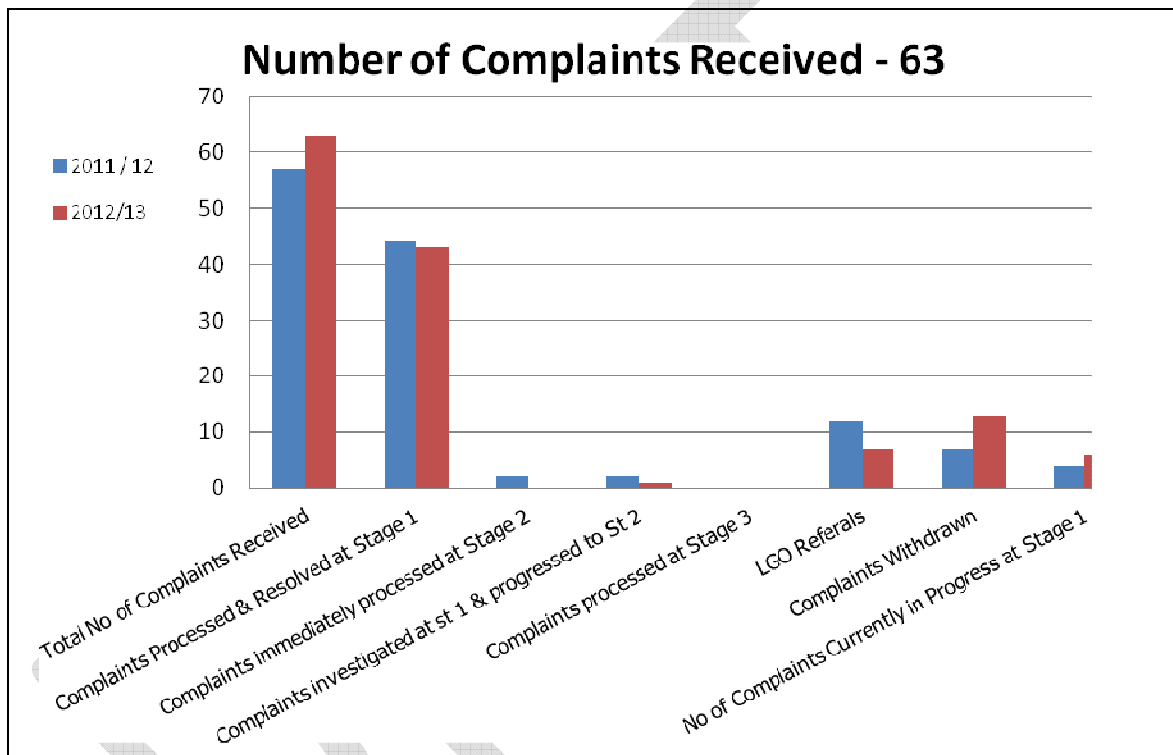
ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

All figures detailed below are from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013. Reference is also made to outstanding complaints or complaints which were reported as not being agreed or completed as of 31 March 2012.

4.0 SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

4.1 A total number of 63 complaints were received across all social care teams during the 2012 – 2013 financial year. This reflects a 10% increase in the number of complaints received when compared with the 57 complaints that were received during the last financial year (April 2011 – March 2012).

4.2



4.3 The six complaints which were received during March 2013 but which were not actually completed within the 2012 / 2013 financial year have now been responded to during April 2013, all within 20 working days

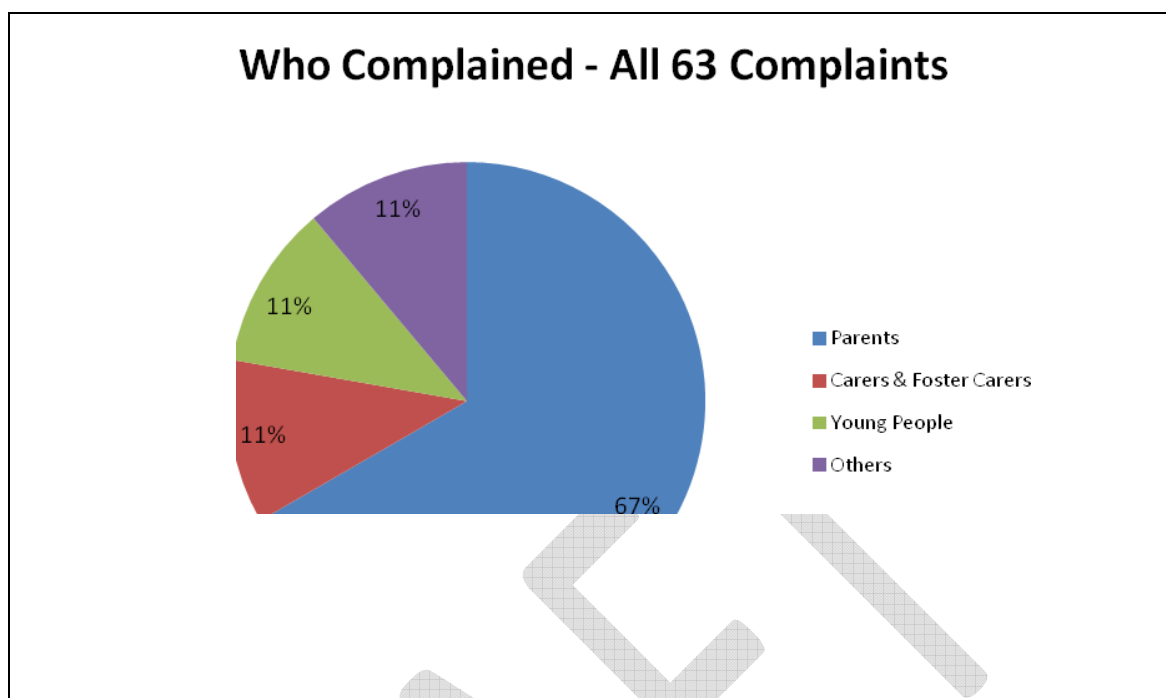
4.4 In addition to the 63 complaints received in 2012 / 2013, 4 complaints received towards the end of 2011 / 2012 were also investigated during the 2012 / 2013 financial year. 1 of these complaints was responded to within 10 working days and three were responded to within 20 working days.

5.0 WHO COMPLAINED?

5.1 The vast majority of complaints were received from Parents. Young people are encouraged to raise their own concerns with the assistance of Advocacy from Bury Children's Rights Service. Bury Children's Services have a joint working protocol with Bury Children's Rights Service and work to ensure that a consistent and timely service is offered to children and young people in the

care of Bury Local Authority when they raise a concern via their advocate.

5.2



6.0 **ADVOCACY**

6.1 14 complaints were made using the service of an external Advocate, compared to 12 during the previous financial year. The number of complaints received through Bury Children's Rights Service was 8, compared with 7 last year. We have seen an increase in complaints from children with health needs being received from the Hospital Citizens Advice Bureau, and work has been undertaken with the CAB to explain the thresholds and remit of Children's Social Care.

6.2 Concerns and complaints received from Children and Young People in Care are very important. These young people are often supported to make a complaint by Bury Children's Rights.

The advocate from Bury Children's Rights Service will initially raise the concern with the Young Person's Social Worker, and if no response is received within a timely manner, this will be referred to the Social Worker's Line Manager for a response.

Should a response not be provided within a timely manner, or if the Young Person is unhappy with the response, their advocate will assist the child or young person to make a formal complaint at Stage 1 of the Statutory Children's Social Care Complaints Procedure.

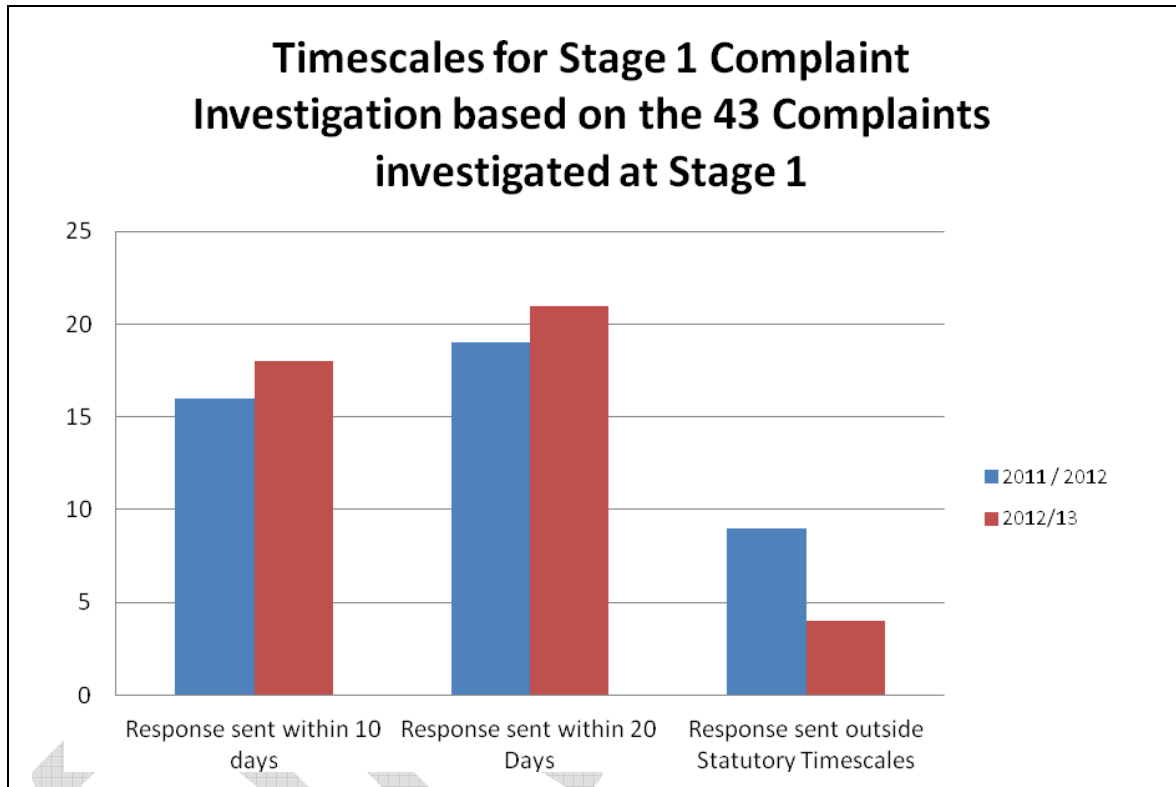
7.0 **TIMESCALES OF STAGE 1 SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS**

7.1 Performance Indicators show that for the third year running, staff have continued to make significant improvements to the timescales in which we have responded to complaints compared with the figures from 2011 / 2012 of

the complaints received and investigated within 2012 /2013, 41.86% of complaints have been dealt with within ten working days, compared with 36.36% for the same period in 2011 / 2012 and 90.69% of complaints have been dealt with within twenty working days compared with 79.55% during 2011 / 2012.

7.2 Delays were agreed with the complainant for the 9.30% of the complaints which were dealt with outside timescales. The additional time taken prevented these complaints being taken to stage 2.

7.3



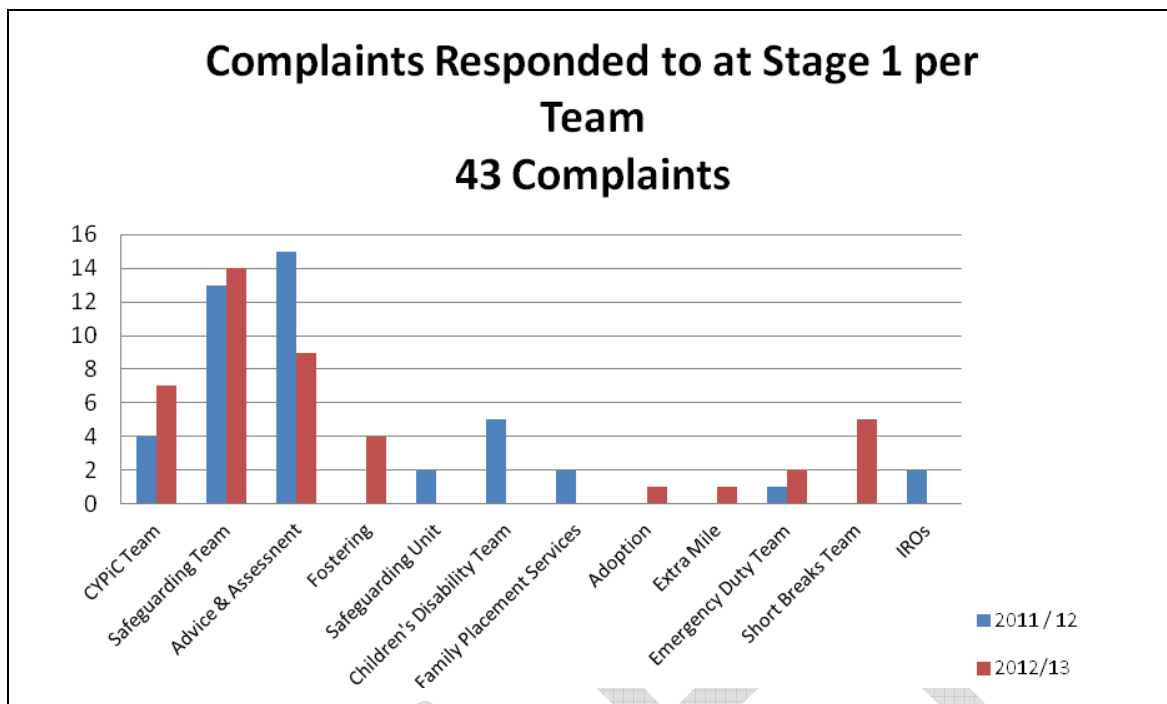
8.0 COMPLAINTS PER TEAM

8.1 Figures show that 32.56% of complaints have been investigated and responded to by the Safeguarding team, which is an increase on the 29.55% during 2011 / 2012. A reduction of complaints against the Advice and Assessment Team has been seen, with 20.93% of the complaints being investigated and responded to by the Advice and Assessment Team compared with 34.09% during 2011 / 2012.

8.2 Neighbouring authorities have noted an increase in complaints over the past twelve months. Despite budget cuts and staff restrictions and restructures, it is pleasing to note that we have only seen a marginal increase in complaints being made.

8.3 Whilst the percentage of complaints between the two teams has changed from last year, the following figures clearly highlight that just over half the complaints received were with regard to the same two Teams as in 2011 / 2012 and in 2012 / 2013.

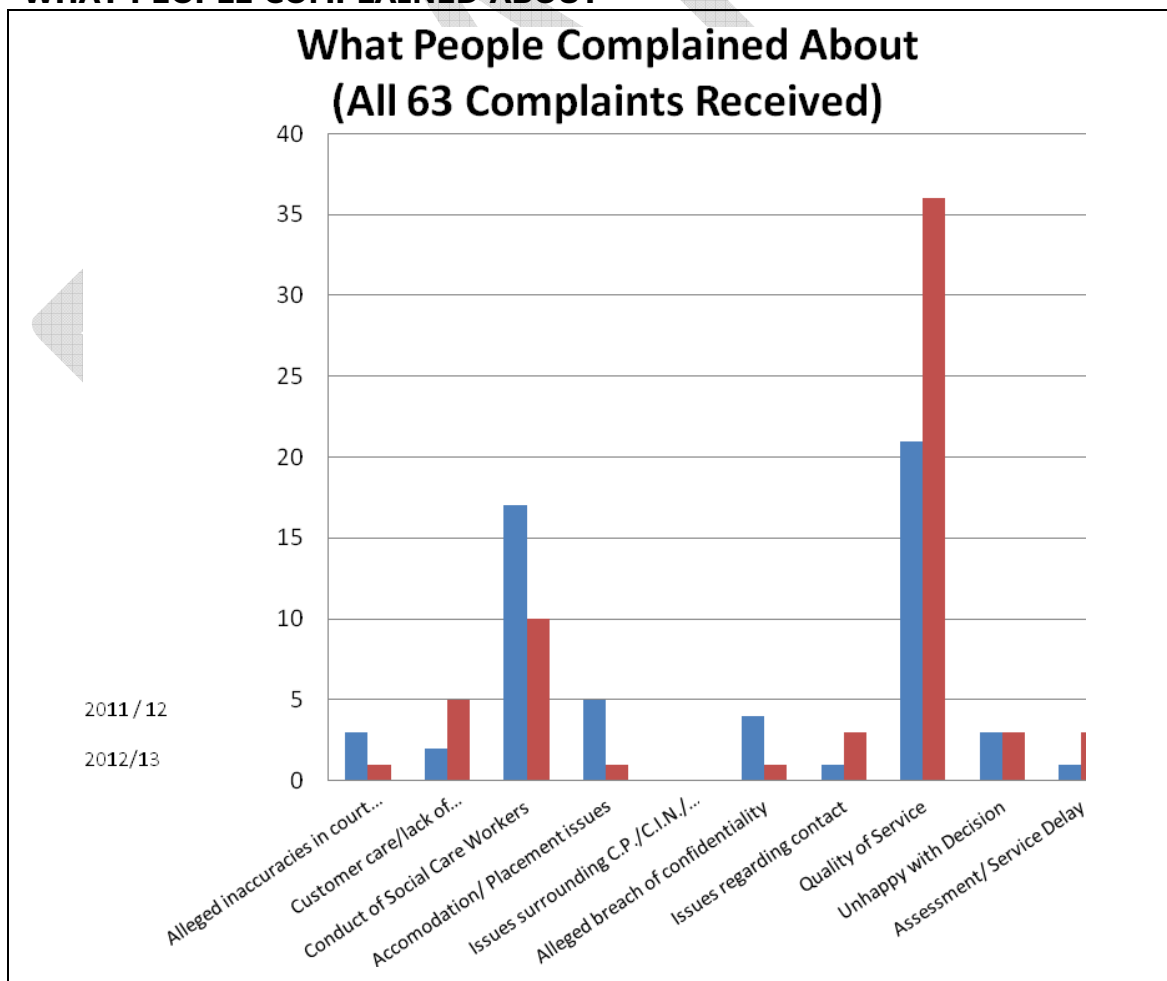
8.5



9.0

WHAT PEOPLE COMPLAINED ABOUT

9.1



9.2 All complaints received in respect of staff conduct have also been addressed personally by Managers on an individual basis.

9.3 The above graph shows that 57.14% of all complaints received between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013 were with regard to the "Quality of Service", however it should be noted that this is quite a wide category. It is pleasing to note that the number of complaints made against individual members of staff has reduced for the second year running.

10.0 HOW WE DEALT WITH COMPLAINTS

10.1 Each of the 43 complaints investigated at Stage 1 was investigated by the relevant Service Manager or Team Manager, and a response was provided to the Complainant explaining the situation or what the service intends to do as a result of the complaint. In the majority of cases, a letter of explanation or an apology was sufficient to resolve the matter.

10.2 1 complainant remained dissatisfied with the Stage 1 outcome and progressed to Stage 2. The Local Authority partially upheld this complaint at Stage 2, and has followed recommendations from both the Investigating Officer and Independent Person to change working practice.

10.3 There have been 7 complaints which were received by the Local Government Ombudsman and which we were asked to supply information:

Case Closed – no evidence of maladministration (2)

Case Closed – No fault in the Council's Actions & no need for the LGO to investigate (1)

Case Closed – The Council has provided a satisfactory remedy (2)

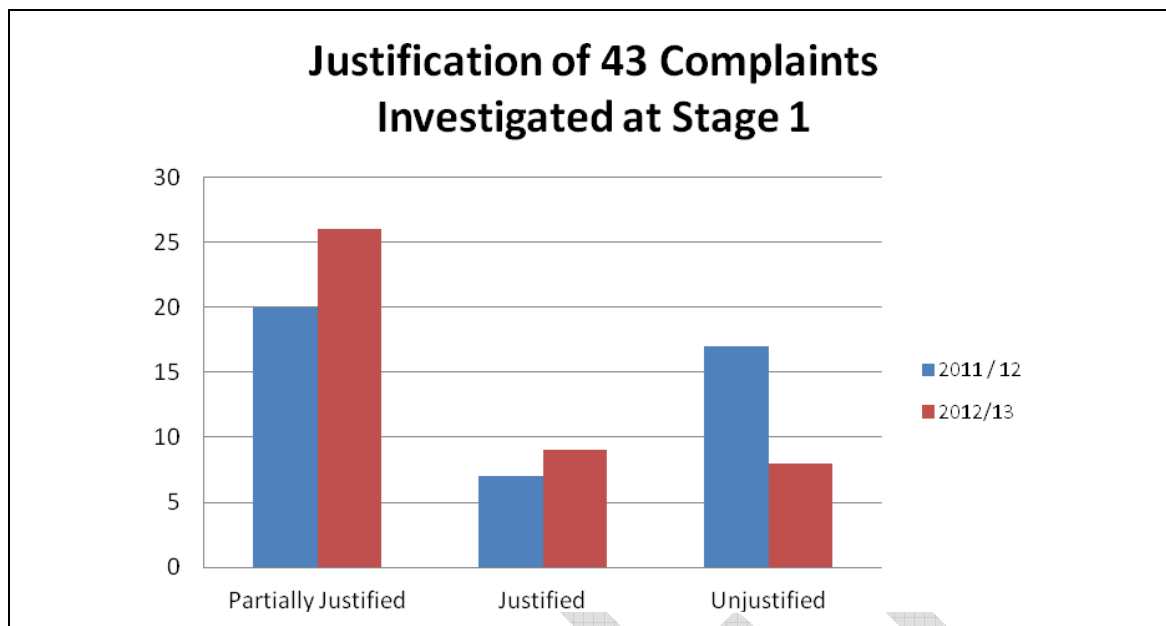
1 case is currently outstanding with the Ombudsman, awaiting a decision as to whether they are happy with the information supplied or whether they intend to investigate.

At the end of the financial year, 1 case was being investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman. The Council upheld the element of the complaint surrounding delay during a stage 1 and 2 investigation. This was confirmed by the final decision of the Ombudsman who has stated that this delay was maladministration which led to injustice for the family. A further apology and a small financial payment was made to the complainant in respect of the distress caused.

10.5 At the time of writing this report, we have not received a copy of the Ombudsman's draft complaints report.

10.6 There have therefore been no complaints that progressed to Stage 3 and at the time of writing.

10.7



11.0 TIMESCALES FOR STAGE 2 SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS

11.1 Out of the 2 complaints which were investigated at stage 2, 1 was completed within 25 working days and the second was completed within the maximum 65 working day timescale.

12.0 BUDGET POSITION

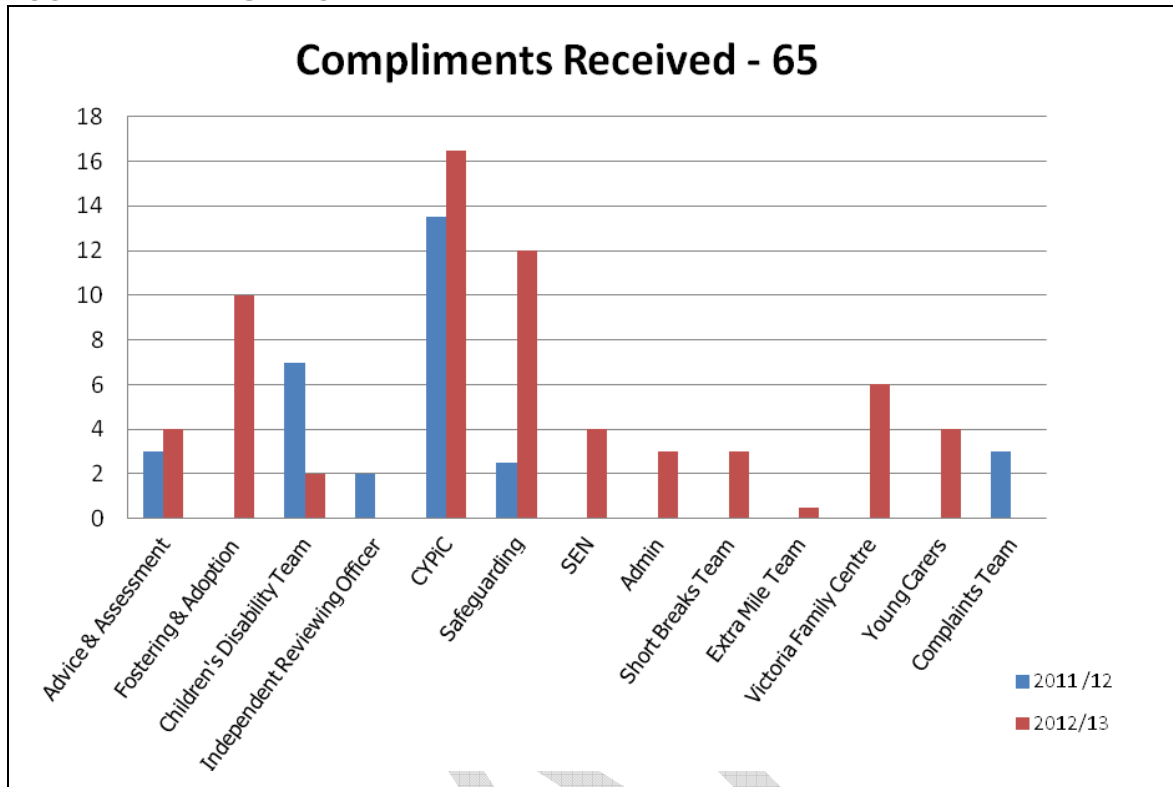
12.1 With the current budget pressures within the Authority and the growing trend of increased complaints in neighbouring Local Authorities, Members should note that in order to minimise the costs of Stage 2 Investigations, this is the second year in which we have asked Team Managers rather than Service Managers and Strategic Leads to respond to the majority of Stage 1 Investigations. This enables Service Managers and Strategic Leads to carry out Stage 2 Investigations for other Services within Children’s Services. This has resulted in costs being incurred for the Independent Person only rather than the Investigating Officer and Independent Person. Whilst this has reduced the invoice costs of the recent investigations, it should be noted that this does have had an impact on staff time.

12.2 A total of £1007.70 has been spent on Stage 2 Investigations from April 2012 to March 2013, which is a saving compared with £2220.47 spent on Stage 2 Investigations during the previous financial year.

12.3 There is currently no dedicated budget for Complaint Investigations. Whilst we have seen a decrease in complaints received, there is a national trend of people wishing to take complaints further; Therefore the potential remains for an increase in Stage 2 complaints. It is too easy for a poor or partial response to be sent to a complainant as a quick fix. Consideration could be given for Stage 2 Complaints Investigations to be funded by the budget for the Department for which the complaint is regarding.

13.0 COMPLIMENTS RECEIVED

13.1



13.2 65 compliments regarding the Children's Social Care Teams have been received over the last twelve months, which is more than double those which were received during the last financial year.

13.3 It is pleasing to note that for the second year running, the Children and Young People in Care (CYPiC) Team have received an increase in the number of compliments received. It is also worth noting that the compliments received and recorded by the Safeguarding Team have increased from 2.5 during 2011 / 2012 to 12 in the current year. It is also heartening to see that other teams are receiving compliments. The Victoria Family Centre is a resource for children in care to meet up with their families, which can be distressing at times. It is therefore pleasing to see the high number of compliments that this team have received. It is also pleasing to see the number of compliments being paid to Fostering and Adoption Team for their support in successfully placing children with new families.

14.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES MONITORING

14.1 Whilst efforts have been made to monitor the ethnic origin of the Authority's complainants; many have not returned the diversity questionnaire.

14.2 Due to the limited number of questionnaires being returned, a true and accurate reflection of the Authority's Complainants cannot be reported.

15.0 REPEAT AND VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

15.1 It should be noted that there have been a small number of complaints which

may be construed as either vexatious or repeated. This is something that has also been noted by colleagues in neighbouring Authorities. This type of complaint impacts greatly on the time of both the Complaints Co-Ordinator and Departmental Staff, and hinders the completion of other complaints.

16.0 DEVELOPMENT OF COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT & EXPERTISE

16.1 The North West Complaints Managers Group meets bi-monthly. Meetings are well attended. The network aims to raise standards for Complaint Management across Authorities. Both this group, and the Children's Subgroup continue to be a valuable source of advice and support.

17.0 LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

17.1 In order to demonstrate learning from complaints and the Department's commitment to use complaints to improve standards of services, all Service Managers complete a "Lessons Learnt" form following each complaint investigation. All recommendations arising from complaints have been recorded and followed up by Service Managers.

17.2 During the last twelve months, a report has been issued to Service Managers on a quarterly basis to ensure feedback to complaints is reported back to staff.

17.3 Feedback and discussion from complaints also takes place with Team Managers during the monthly Social Care Performance Group Meetings. This feedback is then shared with staff during Team Meetings.

17.3 Some complaints identify lessons learnt in dealing with an individual or family; others offer a wider learning experience

17.4 The recommendations which have arisen from complaints during 2012 / 2013 which have now been implemented are detailed below:

- Additional resources for meetings with families to be minuted to ensure clarity of decisions
- Changes have been made to the Short breaks Business Management to promote positive outcomes.
- Continued staff training and implementation of surveys to ensure Children's wishes and feelings are heard
- Amendments to the process of social worker involvement following Special Guardianship & residency to ensure advice and support is available
- Development of further links with the Jewish Federation to develop cultural awareness of needs and resources
- Assessing Social Workers have all received a practice briefing regarding note taking and the quality of notes.
- The AIM list is now maintained by the Safeguarding Unit to ensure timely allocation of assessments
- Clear Practice guidance to be developed regarding Family Members caring for children
- The Customer Care Charter is in the process of being updated

and will be re-circulated to staff.

- CSE BSCB Strategy Awareness Raising Schedule was delivered in March 2013
- Ownership is taken for referrals made to other services by following up the referral to ensure progression and to ensure the service user is not waiting for an unacceptable period of time.
- Procedures changed within the Emergency Duty Team regarding passing on details to the Advice and Assessment Team and the Fostering Team the following day.
- Procedures amended so that families see conference reports prior to the day of the Conference
- Staff regularly advised about the quality of their work which is monitored by regular supervision
- All Initial Assessments which relate to an assessed need which needs consideration by the DRM Panel are to be completed giving a broad overview of need and not suggesting the package of care. This will alleviate complaints regarding the package of care not being received where the child does not meet the threshold as determined by the DRM Panel

18.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 18.1 The Complaints process has been monitored and evaluated throughout the year to ensure that we not only meet the requirements of the statutory regulations and guidance, but that of our Service Users. Improved feedback and learning from complaints may be a factor in the relatively small increase in complaints compared to increases seen in other Local Authorities. We are able to evidence that changes to Social Care processes have been made and also that improvements have been made to the Authority's response time to complaints.
- 18.2 There is still further scope for the timescales in which we respond to complaints to be improved and for complaints to contribute towards improvements to the services we provide.
- 18.3 Experienced Team Managers have worked to assist Assistant Team Managers in the investigation and response to complaints, to ensure that we continue to work to resolve complaints quickly and effectively.
- 18.4 It is essential to the smooth running of investigating and responding to complaints that delays are kept to a minimum, and that any delays in the investigation process do not add to the initial complaint. Whilst it is pleasing to note that staff have made huge improvements in the completion of complaints within timescales and have reduced the number of complaints responded to outside the statutory timescales, there is still scope to improve the number of complaints that we respond to within the statutory response time of ten working days.
- 18.5 Strict monitoring and following up on complaint investigation continues to be a priority to ensure complaints are responded to effectively within the ten day timeframe.

Welfare Reform

Welfare Reform is a key policy area of the coalition government. The timetable of individual reform is a long-term one currently leading up to 2017. The reforms are driven by the ethos of work being the preferred option, localisation and the need to reform what is seen as a complex benefit regime.

As a local authority, Bury has been affected by several aspects of Welfare Reform. These have taken effect from April 13- July13. The purpose of this report is to summarise the impact of these reforms on Bury residents and to update on actions taken by the Council and partners in relation to them.

The main changes:

Under Occupancy charge/Bedroom Tax

Effective from 1st April 13

Reduction in Housing Benefit if over-occupied: 14% of rent charged for 1 spare bedroom: 25% of rent charged for 2 bedrooms and above. Pensioners excluded from this reform.

Council Tax Support

Effective from 1st April 13

Council Tax Benefit abolished and replaced with a local scheme. LAs given funding for their scheme based on previous year spend less 10%. Pensioners excluded from this reform.

Main features of Bury CTS scheme:

- Payment restricted to Band B (ie no benefit paid above the Band B amount)
- Backdating of benefit abolished
- Increase in non-dependent deductions
- Abolition of Second Adult Rebate

Further, certain vulnerable groups protected, including disabled

Social Fund

This was previously a national scheme administered by DWP. It was localised from April 13 with each local authority being given a fixed grant to administer their own scheme.

Other Welfare Reforms which impact on Bury residents:

Universal Credit: this replaces various state benefits with a single payment. It is paid monthly direct to the customer and is intended to replicate the experience of receiving a monthly salary. Implementation has been drastically scaled back with the number of pathfinders being reduced and customers receiving the benefit approximately only 1000 so far nationally. The type of claim currently being made as a UC claim has been restricted: ie single claimants with no children who have recently stopped working. Currently, the earliest it will start in Bury is April 2015, although it should be noted that this doesn't include pensioner claims.

Another issue which is affecting Bury residents is the impact of the revised sanctions regime administered by DWP.

Bury response

The focus has been on a partnership approach involving the sharing of information, publicity campaigns, approaches in terms of developing relevant policies and the sharing of funding opportunities.

The Welfare Reform Board is the over-arching body in developing Bury's approach to Welfare reform. This group comprises representatives from all Council departments, Six Town Housing, CAB, DWP, private landlords, Springs Housing Association and MP caseworkers. The group meets on a monthly basis and has been in operation since October 2011.

Various initiatives have been developed by the Board including pre April publicity campaigns to customers and providing intensive training on the changes to a wide variety of staff and also to Members. The work continues and oversees various initiatives which have been developed in relation to the individual reforms which are referred to in the actions taken in each area below. The Board has also worked together to identify and develop debt counselling and work related solutions which are available as part of a holistic response to those affected by Welfare Reform.

Under occupancy/bedroom tax

This refers to the impact on Six Town Housing as we don't have access to any comprehensive information from Housing Associations.

The position as at w/c 16.9.13 is illustrated in the table below:

	Week 5	Week 25
Number of tenants affected	954	795
Number in rent arrears	496	453
Total rent arrears of those tenants affected by under occupation	£70,151	£108,869
Amount of rent arrears associated with under	£24,000	£68,253

occupation		
Estimated additional rent arrears	£261,000	£158,308

The reduction in the overall number of affected tenants is due to a number of reasons, including tenants taking in lodgers, changes in circumstances and people moving into work or home. The overall estimated increase in rent arrears predicted in the impact assessment has been downgraded to reflect the current position.

The current position on under occupation rent arrears is worrying and continues to have an adverse impact on overall rent arrears.

Although under occupation rent arrears continue to have an impact, it should be noted that the weekly increase has levelled off over the last eight weeks, fluctuating between £60,000 and £68,000. It is also worthy to note that the majority of affected tenants are attempting to meet the shortfall in Housing Benefit and the number of non payers has reduced significantly, as highlighted in the table below:

	Paid in full	Part paying	Not paying
Week 2	37.50%	8.10%	54.40%
Week 25	41.70%	43.90%	14.40%

Actions taken since the implementation of Under occupancy/bedroom tax

Housing Review Team: this has been in operation since July 13 and is a temporary team funded by the Council consisting of staff from Benefits, Housing Options and Six Town Housing. This team is very pro-active in contacting customers affected by the charge who aren't paying and provides advice and information to tenants affected by the reforms, with the view to identifying potential solutions, which include:

- Paying and staying;
- Rehousing, including offering priority rehousing through the Council's Allocation Policy;
- Advice on taking in lodgers;
- Supporting customers to apply for Discretionary Housing Benefit;
- Supporting customers to seek a mutual exchange;
- Referral for debt / welfare benefits advice via the in house CAB team; and
- Helping towards the cost of moving.

- Signposting to work options where appropriate

A summary of the key outcomes achieved by the Housing Solutions Team since it became operational in July 2013 is given below:

No. of tenants contacted	No. of cases successfully resolved	No. of tenants who have successfully secured DHP	No. of tenants that have been helped to move	No. of pending housing moves scheduled
134	63	22	3	8

A range of other steps have been taken by Six Town Housing address performance issues and support tenants affected by the under occupation penalty. These include:

- The redirection of internal resources to create 3 temporary posts in the Rent Income team;
- Holding a series of community road shows across the borough, aimed at offering tenants advice and information about the Under Occupation Charge, Total Cap on Benefits and Universal Credit roll out;
- Launching the Steps to Success employment pledge to support customers into work and training;
- Planning to launch the Credit Union on the 24th October 2013.
- Ongoing staff briefings and communication to ensure they have the tools and skills needed, with over 100 Six Town Housing staff attending recent briefings.

In order to give consistency and resilience to Implementation of a Multi-Agency Review panel to consider cases requiring a court order or an eviction warrant. Consideration is given that every possible alternative has been explored by Six Town Housing as well as the Housing Review Team.

Council Tax Support

Number of households affected:

01 April 13 808

11 July 2013 - 699 households affected

30 September 2013 - 695

In summary we saw a drop in affected cases straight after main billing but the number of cases affected appears to have levelled out at approximately 700.

The impact on collection and customers is being closely monitored. To date, collection remains strong: as at the end of September we are only 0.57% down on collection in comparison to the same time last year. Further, we have issues less summons` in comparison to previous years: see below.

2013/14 - 5,663

2012/13 - 7,535

2011/12 - 6,104

Our experience to date does not appear to be replicated in other local authorities who seem to be experiencing much more difficulty in collection with large increases in the number of summons` they have issued this year.

Action taken:

Training: all staff have been fully trained in all aspects of debt advice and recovery options for customers affected by Welfare Reform.

Debt advice: staff have been trained in where to signpost appropriate customers. CAB staff are sited with Revenue and Benefit staff at Whittaker Street to facilitate this.

Although we have managed to avoid the cuts to our benefit scheme which other local authorities have had to implement, it is evident that we will have to make further cuts in year 2. Proposed options are currently under consideration.

Social Fund

The Bury Support Fund covers two main areas of financial assistance – people resettling in to the community and those in crisis/ short term financial need. Food parcels are also provided to those in crisis or who we cannot help financially.

The service is delivered via a small team of officers within Customer Support & Collections and includes CAB staff funded temporarily by the Council to offer debt advice.

Applications are either made via our contact centre or an online form – the form is proving more useful for resettlement cases where people are being assisted by other teams/ agencies, whilst crisis cases are best dealt with over the telephone.

The first five months have seen the following

- 210 Food Parcels issued
- 150 Crisis Payments (£10,079) Averaging £67
- 102 Miscellaneous resettlement (£65,946) Averaging £646
- 32 Domestic Violence resettlement (£18,728) Averaging £585
- 13 Homeless Prevention (£5,482.00) Averaging £422

Benefit cap

The overall benefits cap was introduced in July'13 to limit the amount received by benefits claimants to an amount similar to the average earnings; £500/ week for a couple/ family, £350/ week for a single person.

The cap is applied to the Housing Benefit paid to a claimant rather than the DWP/ HMRC benefits.

Initial estimates by DWP suggested Bury may have upwards of 90 families affected, in reality we have 34.

Weekly reductions range from £172 to less than £1, the average being £60 and the total amount withdrawn £2,034 week.

Thirteen are STH properties, 2 Housing Association with the remaining 19 being privately rented.

We have been working closely with the C.A.B. to assist the people affected with budgeting advice, assistance with looking for cheaper accommodation and advice about obtaining work.

Unfortunately many families did not take advantage of the support offered and a recent meeting with housing providers suggested that many did not understand the link between their Housing Benefit reducing and their rent.

Summary

- A major issue which has emerged and is familiar to all partners involved is lack of understanding and engagement from customers affected.
- On occasion where support has been accepted by customers it has been necessary to closely monitor that they have followed through with agreed actions.
- Partnership working and awareness of other solutions such as work options available has been crucial.
- The Sanctions regime administered by DWP is having a detrimental effect on customers.

Associated policies

Appendix 1

Corporate debt

The Council recognises that in these economically challenging times and with the ongoing impacts of the Welfare Benefit reforms, many customers are struggling to manage and maintain their essential living expenses on lower incomes.

The policy is the Council's statement on how it will work with its customers and partners (Six Town Housing and Bury District Citizens Advice Bureau) to effectively collect debts from customers.

Our clear objective is to make sure that those who have the means to pay do and those individuals/families in genuine crisis, receive the targeted help and support they need to increase personal capacity, prevent raising debts and thereby protect Council revenue.

This new approach the need for making full use of the resources available, often in different ways to the past, is clearly illustrated in the attached case studies.

Appendix 2

Discretionary Housing Payments

Local Authorities have the power to award payments of DHP to claimants who are in receipt of Housing Benefits

The recent Welfare Reform changes introduced in April 2013 made significant changes to the awards of Housing Benefit and it is therefore necessary to formalise a policy for the awards of DHP

Housing Benefit reforms including, social sector size criteria changes and the introduction of a benefits cap means that there will be a significant number of claimants facing shortfalls since April 2013

The Government recognised that Local Authorities would be faced with an increased number of applications for DHP and so from April 2013 increased funding from £165,667 in 2012/2013 to £357,994 for 2013/2014

Whilst this has been a significant increase in funding we will not have enough funding to be able to provide assistance to all those affected by these reforms

A policy in relation to award of these payments has been drafted and is attached.

Appendix 3

Poverty Strategy

This was approved by Cabinet in February and is currently being updated by members of the Welfare reform Board to highlight the best indicators to track the direction of travel of poverty in Bury: eg number of people accessing food parcels.



Corporate Debt Policy

Bury Council
And
Six Town Housing



**BURY COUNCIL/SIX TOWN HOUSING
CORPORATE DEBT POLICY**

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 What is a Corporate Debt Policy

The CDP is the Council statement on how it will work with its customers and partners to collect debts from customers. Bury Council and its partners Six Town Housing and Bury District Citizens Advice Bureau have developed a clear consistent approach to dealing with people in debt which is underpinned by the robust recovery processes already in place.

1.2 Policy Objective

Our clear objective is to make sure that those who have the means to pay do pay and those individuals/families in genuine crisis, receive the targeted help and support they need to prevent raising debts and increase personal capacity.

In order to maximise income for the provision of services, Bury Council's Corporate Debt Approach will ensure that we collect debt owing promptly, effectively and economically, while ensuring fair treatment to all debtors.

1.3 Why have a Corporate Debt Policy

The Council has formalised the policy for the following reasons:

It is essential that all monies due are collected effectively by the Council in the most efficient way and that debt owed to the Council is kept to a minimum. This is because the Council has both a legal duty and a responsibility to its citizens to make sure that income due is paid promptly.

With the significant challenges of the welfare benefit reform and the declining economy it is critical that we manage the risks and protect business revenue. It is essential that all income is collected as effectively and efficiently as possible to ensure we have the resources needed to deliver the valuable services required.

The Council recognises that early intervention and professional debt advice is an important element of the Government's Anti-Poverty Strategy. This policy promotes working with partners to help customers move towards self sufficiency and independency. Whilst recognising that some people will need support with new demands of managing online claims, maintaining monthly budgets and assisting those who may be unable to access mainstream financial services.

Transparency is vital in maintaining public confidence, supporting our communities and empowering our people. It means helping people to understand what is expected of them and what they should expect from the Council. It also means explaining clearly the reasons for taking any recovery action and promoting ways to prevent this in the future, but also making sure we are working together to support our most vulnerable.

Having a Corporate Debt Policy is not only good practice, it is now essential that we are working together to provide a clear and consistent approach which promotes efficiency in the collection of debt. The policy makes sure that every customer is treated equally and fairly and supported through these changing times. It also ensures that every customer in debt is able to access advice and support, affordable lending facilities and employment opportunities.

The Corporate Debt Policy will make sure we are effectively working together to support our customers, promoting positive cultural changes to reduce dependency and helping to maintain and protect the Councils and Six Town Housing's cash-flow.

1.4 What is a Debt

For the purposes of the CDP, a debt is any amount of Council and Six Town Housing income covered by this policy that has not been paid by the due date.

All bills and invoices will be raised at the earliest opportunity, will be written in plain English and will contain clear and concise information as to:

- What the bill is for
- When payment is due
- How to pay
- Who to contact for additional advice or information.

1.5 Why are people in debt.

A debt is when you owe somebody money, so anyone who receives a bill or request for payment from the Council or Six Town Housing is in debt until this is paid. A positive payment culture is promoted across the borough to ensure effective collection of Council and Six Town Housing revenue and prevent customers falling behind with payments.

Debt is not a problem until somebody cannot pay it. If a customer cannot pay a debt it is essential they contact us immediately in order to prevent debts spiralling out of control and to try and prevent further action being taken against them which could also result in additional costs.

2.0 Scope and Aims of the Corporate Debt Policy

2.1 What debts are covered by this policy

The policy cover all debts owed to the Council and Six Town Housing.

Including:

- Current Rent Arrears
- Council Tax
- Parking Fines
- Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Fraud Overpayments
- Business Rates
- Former Tenant Arrears
- Council Car Loans
- Garage Debts
- Council Sundry Debts

Including:

Adult Care Services – Contributions to care fees & accommodation, care link, transport charges, and community resettlement charges.

Housing Services – Repairs, damages, leasehold services and recharges to departments.

Property Services – Commercial rents, ground rents and garage sites.

Children's Services – Nursery fees, recoupment charges and school meals.

Environmental and Development Services – Building inspection fees, commercial waste collections, leisure services fees and charges.

2.2 Early advice is essential to prevent further action and costs.

The Council has a duty to make sure that all revenue owed to the Council is collected effectively and efficiently for the benefit of all Council Taxpayers.

In striving to continually improve collection and recovery performance, the Council recognises that some people do not pay their debts for a variety of reasons. This may include poverty or other financial hardship, which the Council will endeavour to balance against its duty to collect.

Conversely, the policy aims to take a robust approach to those who can pay, but won't pay and each service will apply their own robust recovery procedures to ensure collection is maximised. The policy does not prejudice any legal action the Council or Six Town Housing may wish to take.

It is essential that any customer struggling to make a payment lets us know as soon as possible. We can then work with individuals to resolve their issues and prevent unnecessary hardship. Where customers fail to make contact or maintain arrangements then recovery action will continue. The general collection policy is to pursue the collection of all debts owed to the Council and Six Town Housing. This will be done as vigorously and efficiently as possible in line with current legislation and the most appropriate methods of recovery.

A range of partnerships have been put in place to ensure that any customer needing help to manage their money or deal with debts have access to free, independent help and advice.

This policy details the Council's Corporate Debt Approach to debt recovery and the additional measures introduced. Best practice will be applied to all debt collection and recovery activities within appropriate legal powers.

2.3 Policy Aims

The key aims of this policy are as follows:

To use fair and effective recovery practices in the pursuance of all debts owed to the Council and Six Town Housing and ensure that those with the means to pay do pay.

Ensure a professional, consistent and timely approach to recovery action across all of the Council and Six Town Housing's functions.

To fully consider the nonpayer's circumstances and ability to pay, so a clear distinction can be made between the nonpayer who won't pay and the nonpayer who genuinely can't pay.

Make sure any customer falling in to debt is referred for advice in dealing with debts and supported to manage their finances better in order to prevent future problems.

Effectively access and utilise the valuable resources available within the private and third sectors.

Raise awareness on basic bank accounts and affordable lending facilities therefore helping customers avoid high interest pay day loans and door stop lenders.

Improve the levels of income collected by the Council and Six Town Housing and reduce levels of arrears.

Treat individuals consistently and fairly regardless of age, sex, race, gender, disability and sexual orientation and to ensure that individual's rights under the Data Protection Act and Human Rights legislation are protected.

Ensure that debts are managed in accordance with legislative provisions and best practice.

Deliver an alternative approach based on flexible working to achieve better outcomes for individuals and families.

Streamline service delivery by targeting help and support where it is needed and at the level it is needed at in order to increase independence and protect future revenue.

3.0 Recognising the Need for Change

3.1 The Changing Landscape

The Council recognises that in these economically challenging times and with the ongoing impacts of the Welfare Benefit reforms. Many customers are struggling to manage and maintain their essential living expenses on lower incomes and levels of debt both locally and nationally are increasing.

3.2 Reasons for debt.

We have asked customers about the main reason they had got in to debt and they range from the following:

- Change of circumstances
- Unemployment
- Change of working hours
- Other debts
- Benefit changes
- Pay day loans
- Not being able to budget
- Relationship Issues
- Large unexpected bills

Therefore as reduced income and multiple debts are the root cause to many of the symptoms our customer face, this is where we need to put additional measures in place to support our customers and protect our revenue.

3.3 Efficient and Fair Debt Collection.

This policy has been developed to ensure a Corporate Debt Approach is implemented across the borough. It aims to adopt fair, effective and efficient debt collection and recovery practices including:

Providing appropriate and easy payment methods and ensuring that bills are accurate, timely and clear.

Encouraging customers who fall into arrears to contact us at the earliest opportunity and agree to sustainable payment arrangements appropriate to their circumstances.

Conducting early risk assessments and raising awareness at the first point of contact. Informing customers how to access additional services and ensuring that advice and support is tailored to meet the individual needs of the customer.

Identify deliberate non-payers or those who delay payment and increase customer awareness on how to avoid further action and prevent additional costs.

Take timely and effective enforcement action where appropriate against those customers who wont pay and don't pay.

Help to reduce the effect of debt of people on low incomes by working together to support customers through the welfare reform changes and raising awareness of local provisions.

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Provide joined up holistic services to remove duplication, streamline the customer's journey and secure positive outcomes.

Deliver targeted campaigns to ensure that maximum benefit take-up occurs and is sustained by working with our customers to help them manage the new demands. Work in partnership targeting help and support to where it is most needed to; improve budgeting skills, increase financial capacity and support customers in to work.

Maximise the valuable services available from our new local Credit Union, promoting the benefits of affordable lending to our customers and utilising it as a valuable tool to protect Council and Six Town Housing revenue.

4.0 How Change will be Achieved.

4.1 The Legal and Policy Framework for Legal Recovery

The Council has a legal duty to ensure cost effective billing, collection and recovery of all sums due to it. This policy is in addition to existing legislation and is designed to enhance the robust procedures already in place to collect debt.

4.2 Additional Measures Introduced

People owing the Council and Six Town Housing money will be encouraged to make contact as soon as they get into difficulty with making a payment, in order to resolve problems and prevent increasing debt problems.

Advice and information will be provided at the first point of contact in relation to all council debts. An initial risk assessment will be done early in the recovery stage and an arrangement to pay will be made. Customers will be advised about free independent money advice services provided locally and given information about free on line help available.

In order to provide clear up to date information to all of our customers, details of all non profit making debt advice and money management facilities across the borough have been mapped. This will be updated on to a central information store with direct links to partners and is easily accessible to customers.

We are also working in partnership with Step Change (formally CCCS) who is the UK's leading debt charity. We are utilising this valuable, free independent service and have hot keys in place within the Council and Six Town Housing.

This enables us to make sure any customers who needs help dealing with debts gets help dealing with their debts.

This service is free and independent, therefore it helps us steer our customers away from costly profit making debt management companies. The customer is given budgeting advice and sustainable payment arrangements are put in place to deal with the priority debts and help prevent further action and costs.

If customers continue to fall into debt, do not pay or break repayment arrangements, then robust recover processes will continue. The council recognises it is essential to act on any information received on the income and expenditure form.

We now have a corporate debt manager in place to over see the policy, act as a single point of contact for multiple debt cases and work with partners to review and progress our highest risk cases in the most appropriate way.

4.3 A Corporate Approach

In cases where multiple debts are identified and the customer is struggling to pay, a referral will be made to CAB. Once a referral for additional help and advice has been made then normal recovery action should continue in line with recover procedures.

All cases where multiple debts are identified need to be brought to the immediately to the corporate debt manager. These multiple debt cases are often the symptom of some other root cause therefore need to be carefully monitored and reviewed.

All customers referred to the CAB, will be provided with initial help and advice needed and re-payment arrangements will be put in place to prevent further problems. If the customer has multiple complex debts or multiple complex issues, they will be referred on to get specialist help from a money advice worker.

The specialist money advice workers already have several established points of contact across the Council and Six Town Housing, which they will continue to utilise when needed as this is working really well. In cases of multiple debts and/or multiple issues, the money advice worker will contact the corporate debt manager as the single point of contact. The corporate debt manager will review all of the surrounding facts, negotiate across departments where needed and work with Six Town Housing, CAB and other agencies to make sure all appropriate measures are in place to support the customer.

After conducting a full review of the case, if the corporate debt manager has concerns about the customers mounting debts and inability to cope and/or the increasing costs to the council, then the case will be progressed as a 'family in crisis'.

4.4 New Measures in line with a Corporate Debt Approach.

4.5 Early Identification

Early identification of multiple debts, professional debt advice and clear sustainable repayment plans are essential to prevent further problems and protect the Council and Six Town Housing revenue.

Identifying deliberate non-payers or those who delay payment and taking timely and effective enforcement action to protect Council and Six Town Housing revenue

Whilst it is the role of the individual department to collect monies owed to the Council and Six Town Housing by ensuring robust recovery methods are carried out within its own powers and in accordance with legislation. The corporate debt approach will ensure that we are working together to protect Council and Six Town Housing revenue and prevent increasing debts for the customer.

Individual departments will maintain responsibility for offering welfare benefit and debt advice. The corporate debt policy also ensures that all customers can access these services at the first point of contact.

In line with current procedures, whilst it is the individual departmental responsibility to consider individual circumstances, financial commitments and other debts. The corporate debt approach ensures that multiple debts are identified and the most effective and efficient way of recovery can be considered.

Any non-payer who is identified as having multiple debts across the Council and Six Town Housing needs to be flagged up immediately to the Corporate Debt Manager. The account should be marked with the appropriate code on the respective computer systems. Whilst recovery proceedings could continue in line with current procedure and legislation, consideration should be given to reviewing current actions taking account of the possibility that the corporate debt approach may resolve their problems.

4.6 Intervention

The Council recognises that in certain circumstances the usual enforcement procedures (such as bailiff action, committal proceedings or eviction) may not be appropriate for some people who find themselves in debt to the Council and Six Town Housing.

This could be because the person might be viewed as vulnerable owing to their individual circumstances or a 'Family in Crisis'. The current vulnerable person's protocols provide guidance for staff and the Council and Six Town Housing's collection agents on how to manage the situation and support a vulnerable person who owes a debt to the Council and Six Town Housing.

They are to be used to support and assist advisors and collection agents to be able to promptly identify vulnerable individuals in order that each person can be treated with dignity and that their individual situation can be dealt with in a sensitive and responsible way.

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People who are considered vulnerable will find themselves in a range of situations and it is important to remember that in many cases people will have tried very hard to manage and will not have deliberately created the situation they find themselves in.

By the time the individual comes to the attention of the debt recovery service it is important to consider that in many cases they may be very concerned and worried about owing money to the Council and/or Six Town Housing and are highly likely to have many other debts as well.

The corporate debt approach will ensure we are working together to support our vulnerable. Having early indicators will highlight potential problems then tailored help and support can be put in place a lot sooner. Cases can then be closely monitored and reviewed and costly, crisis management avoided.

4.7 People who are Vulnerable

People are considered to be vulnerable for many different reasons. Some of these reasons are as follows: -

- Appears to be elderly and it appears may be easily confused.
- Appears to be physically or mentally ill, severely disabled and/or appears to be suffering mental confusion.
- Is heavily pregnant or has young children less than 5 years old and severe social deprivation is evident.
- Is having difficulty communicating due to profound deafness, blindness or language difficulties and there are no local facilities available to reduce these difficulties.
- Long term serious health problems or terminal illness.

The above lists are not exhaustive and each situation will be viewed individually but it is essential that vulnerabilities are captured and flagged up for the effective delivery of a corporate debt approach.

4.8 Indicators

Based on the above descriptions, the member of staff or collection agent can make a decision about whether a nonpayer may be considered vulnerable. The initial request to consider a person as vulnerable may come from a third party, for example the Citizens Advice Bureau, Social Services, Housing.

The examples above are only a guide and each case has to be considered based on the person's individual circumstances.

Any non-payer who is considered potentially vulnerable needs to be flagged up immediately to the Corporate Debt Manager. The account should be marked with the appropriate code on the respective computer systems and full details of vulnerabilities made available. Recovery proceedings will be amended or adjusted accordingly in line with current procedure and legislation.

Any non-payer identified as being vulnerable and having multiple debts across the Council and Six Town Housing needs to be referred to the corporate debt manager immediately, using the agreed referral process.

The Corporate Debt Manager will fully consider any referral and explore any additional measures that could be used more effectively to collect money for the Council and Six Town Housing whilst supporting the customer.

All referrals are assessed on a case by case basis to ensure that the right level of support is delivered to the right person for the right period of time. This will maximise success rates by offering a more efficient and effective alternative approach to customers where historical traditional methods may have failed.

With the nonpayer's consent, further information may be obtained from medical practitioners, social services and other relevant professional partners. It is imperative that this stage is completed as quickly as possible so as to limit any uncertainty or anxiety on the part of the customer concerned.

4.9 Family in Crisis

In order to determine a 'Family in Crisis' a comprehensive review of the individual/family circumstances will be carried out based on the individual circumstances of the case and all other options will have been explored.

For Corporate debt purposes a Family in Crisis' will be:

- A family/individual who is unable to financially cope and is in genuine need
- A family/individual who has multiple debts across the Council and genuinely no means of repaying them
- A family/individual who is high costing to the Council and getting deeper and deeper into debt with the Council

The corporate debt manager will fully review all cases, consider alternative methods to effectively support the customers capacity to re-pay outstanding debts and arrange case conferences where appropriate.

5.0 Clear Outcomes of a Partnership Approach

5.1 Additional Help and Support

We are in a period of financially challenging times and with the significant impacts of the Welfare Benefit Reforms, many of our lowest income families and vulnerable customers will be struggling to cope.

The council recognises that we need to support our customers through these radical changes.

The Corporate Debt Policy ensures we have a professional consistent approach to separate the nonpayer who won't pay and the nonpayer who genuinely can't pay.

It also ensures we are committed to developing and delivering additional measures to protect our most vulnerable and support our families in the most genuine need.

We have developed excellent partnerships across the public, private and third sector. As a result of joint working are able to provide a range of valuable services and opportunities for our customers.

5.2 Our Joint Partnership Approach

5.3 To Increase Personal Capacity, Prevent Raising Debts and Reduce Dependency.

- Increasing personal capacity – We are working with the third sector to provide free, Independent advice and support with welfare benefits, dealing with debts and increasing personal budgeting skills. A three tier approach to debt advice will be delivered to meet the individual needs of customers and move towards self sufficiency and independence. A variety of free debt advice and support will be available online and over the telephone utilising the services of Step Change Charity (formally CCCS). Face to face contact, home visits where needed and a direct route for customers needing specialist debt advice is available through our partnership with Bury District CAB. Joint work with the ESF providers ensures that intensive flexible support is in place for our most disadvantaged families in order to reduce dependency and increase opportunities.
- Creating sustainable employment opportunities – An excellent partnership approach has been developed delivering a range of valuable services to tackle multiple problems at the first point of contact and help customers help themselves. We have local partnerships in place with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and the local contractors delivering the work programme within the private sector. A fully integrated reception area is operational, delivering a range of local services to meet the specific needs of individuals and prepare and support people into work. Joint work with the National Careers Service ensures our customers who need help, are able to access flexible support and training opportunities. Building confidence, gaining new skills and supported in to sustainable employment.

- Providing access to affordable lending facilities and basic bank accounts – Bury Council has worked in partnership with Six Town Housing to successfully secure relevant approvals and funding to establish a Credit Union across the borough. This will provide a range of additional measures to support our most disadvantaged customers, reduce financial exclusion and protect future revenue. A Credit Union will provide an alternative to high interest pay day loans which are commonly used amongst our families on the lowest income. Access to budgeting skills and money management training. It will also provide a range of accounts which can help our customers manage their money better, support our most vulnerable and protect future revenue.

5.4 High level case conferences

Will be introduced to a limited group of customers in genuine need where there are multiple complex debts and issues in order to take a direct, pro-active corporate approach.

The Council and Six Town Housing will agree a protocol that will be used by the corporate debt manager to signpost 'Families in Crisis' to be considered on an individual case conference format. This will ensure that a fair and consistent approach is being used across the borough.

The members of the case conference will be heads of service/director level and any specialist advice worker or advocate who have a direct interest or involvement in the case and the ability to authorise the measures agreed at the case conference.

The purpose of the case conference will be to review all of the surrounding circumstances, agree immediate remedies to prevent further risk to Council/Six Town Housing revenue and support the customer in genuine need. With the immediate risks removed it will also include an established way forward for the customer that is sustainable and the customer is able to maintain.

These could include:

- Writing off some current debts, where they are high costing to the council with low or no ability to repay by the customer.
- Exploring the use of existing grants or funding which could be utilised to repay current debts and appropriate measures needed to support the customer to prevent future problems.
- Considering the current cost of recovery, for example, eviction / re-housing against the current amount of debt and agree the most appropriate way forward.
- Utilise new local provisions like the credit union and hen project, to provide customers with an alternative way of dealing with debt, accessing support and building personal capacity.

The case conference will also agree short and medium term strategies to secure repayment of debt and will give consideration to timescales, options to prioritise some debts and consider suspended recovery on others. Make sure the customer has a sustainable way forward with agreed support in place.

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) will make any overarching decisions as appropriate in relation to a Corporate Debt Approach.

6.0 Principles of Recovery

6.1 Consistency and Proportionality

Measures are taken to ensure that all people are treated in a consistent manner. Special arrangements may be entered into for payments outside the statutory procedures and payments are usually requested which clear the ongoing debt and an amount off the arrears. Where extreme cases of hardship are identified, these may be given extra consideration. All debts owing to the Council and Six Town Housing will be collected in a clear and consistent manner.

As part of the action plan, further analysis of low value cases and case studies where the value of the debt is significantly increased by court; bailiffs' and agents' costs will be carried out.

6.2 Information sharing

Debtors should be encouraged to tell the Council/Six Town Housing or advice agencies where they owe money to more than one department of the Council and to seek advice as quickly as possible.

Where information comes to the attention of one department that the debtor also owes money to another department, that knowledge shall be shared and a common approach agreed, having regard to the current limitations imposed by the Data Protection Act 1998. This will be developed and included in the action plan. A form of authority will be obtained from the customer in all corporate debt cases in order to remove any barriers that prevent the sharing of information across the Council and Six Town Housing.

6.3 Procedures and Training

Although there are variations in the procedures of different departments, they must reflect the Council's requirement for a corporate approach to recovering debts based on the debtor's ability to pay.

Procedure manuals should be available for employees to follow, reinforced by training and management control.

A procedural statement, including a code of conduct, already forms part of the Council's contract with bailiffs acting on its behalf for the recovery of Council Tax.

6.4 Monitoring

Information about the effectiveness of the Council's policy will be used to carry out reviews at regular intervals. This includes ensuring the `crisis approach` encompasses the right customers and consideration of its` effectiveness in helping solving debt problems.

In future monitoring, it will be important to assess the effectiveness of the policy in bringing to light cases of hardship and responding to them sensitively, the effect on the collection of money owed and the effect on the workload of the advice agencies

All outcomes in relation to debts reduced, income maximised and increased dependency will be captured, monitored and reported on. As well as measuring the success of a corporate debt approach this will also help to identify future risks and mitigate against the impacts.

Corporate Debt Policy

Current Recovery Policies

Bury Council
And
Six Town Housing



In accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Council is responsible for levying and collecting Council Tax that is payable on all occupied and unoccupied domestic properties, which are not exempt and are situated within Bury.

The Revenues Operational Manager on behalf of the Council has a duty to recover all outstanding amounts of Council Tax and at all times staff within the Revenues Department will operate according to the Council's strategy.

Policies Specific to Council Tax

It is important that anyone who does not pay their Council Tax by the due date is pursued for payment quickly.

The collection and enforcement of Council Tax are governed by the "Council Tax (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1998

When an instalment or part of an instalment is missed a first Reminder letter will be sent.

Where any overpaid Council Tax Support has been made the amount will be debited back to the charge payer's account.

If the charge-payer fails to make payment or contact the Council following a first Reminder, a Summons will be issued without further notice and costs will be incurred. If payment is received following receipt of 2 Reminders, and they fail to make payment on time on a 3rd occasion, a Final Notice will be sent meaning they will lose the right to pay by instalments and the full balance will become due within seven days.

If no contact has been made following the Final Notice, the Council will issue a summons for the charge payer to appear before the Magistrates' Court for non-payment of the outstanding balance of the Council Tax.

Explanatory notes will be issued with the summons notice explaining the implication of Council Tax enforcement.

If the charge-payer contacts the Council and agrees an arrangement to pay following a summons the resident's employer details will be recorded.

Should the account not be settled by the Court hearing date, the Council will make an application for a Liability Order plus costs.

Where employer details are supplied an attachment to earnings may be considered as an alternative to recover the outstanding debt. This course of action would supersede the use of bailiffs to call/remove goods if appropriate.

Where information about relevant benefits is provided an attachment to benefit may be arranged to recover the outstanding debt. This course of action would supersede the use of bailiffs to call/remove goods.

The council tax recovery section has established links in place with the CAB for any customers obtaining third party help and advice.

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The Council encourages charge payers to contact prior to the Court hearing to pay in full or make an arrangement. They can also resolve any queries they may have, and reduce the need to attend Court as a Liability can be obtained in their absence and kept on file pending an arrangement being kept to.

Staff attending Court will be fully prepared to assist the charge payers who may choose to attend Court for the Liability Order hearing and ensure they have a written breakdown of summons and Liability Order costs available.

A Council Tax Notice of Liability Order and information request with details of the possibility of bailiff action or other recovery action will be issued to the taxpayer within 3 working days of the Court hearing.

Should the debt fail to be recovered by the bailiffs, they will return the case back to the Council in order that they can consider the next form of recovery action.

The Council may consider, where appropriate: Charging Orders, Petitions for Bankruptcy, or take steps to instigate petition for a means enquiry hearing. In addition, the Council may consider Committal to Prison action against habitual late payers for those that intentionally refuse to make payment and/or fail to contact the Council.

Bailiff/External Agency Recovery

When the services of Bailiffs/External Agency Recovery have been determined a service level agreement will exist along with formal written procedures specifying the standard of service to be provided and will cover the following matters:-

- The initial bailiff visit will be expected to be made at the earliest opportunity of receipt of the case.
- Where no contact has been made within office hours then at least one visit will take place outside normal working hours.
- There will be specific procedures agreed with Council officers for the removal of goods.
- The Council will be able to access the external bailiff's system via a complete link in order to make appropriate enquires.

Committals

The Council will send a pre-committal warning letter prior to commencement of proceedings, allowing the charge payer the opportunity to attend an appointment and make payment.

Any committal summonses will be served using methods agreed by the Council.

Where the resident fails to respond a means enquiry summons will be issued.

The Council will charge costs up to the statutory maximum at the time of issuing a means enquiry to cover reasonable costs against the charge payer.

Write-Offs

Any Council Tax debt which is identified for write off will be considered in accordance with the Council's Corporate Write Off Policy (See Appendix 7).

Council Policy

The Council is responsible for the levying and collection of Business Rates (NNDR) for all occupied and unoccupied hereditaments on the Rating List which are not exempt.

To ensure arrears are kept to a minimum, it is essential that the Council operates an effective and efficient approach to the collection of Business Rates using the methods determined by legislation and regulation.

The Business Rates Manager on behalf of the Council has a duty to recover all outstanding amounts of Non Domestic Rates and at all times staff within the Business Rates team will operate in compliance with the Council's Corporate Debts Policy.

Policies Specific to Non-Domestic Rates

Billing, collection and recovery of Business Rates is managed by the Councils Business Rates team.

It is important that anyone who does not pay their Business Rates by the due date is pursued for payment quickly.

When an instalment or part of an instalment is missed a Reminder letter will be sent.

If the charge payer fails to make payment or contact the Council following the reminder letter, a Summons will be issued without further notice and costs will be incurred.

If payment is received following receipt of the reminder letter but the charge payer then fails to pay on time on a 2nd occasion, a Final Notice is sent which cancels the right to pay by instalments. If no payment or contact is made following the issue of the Final Notice, a Summons will be issued without further notice and costs will be incurred.

Explanatory notes will be issued with the Summons notice explaining the implication of Business Rate Enforcement.

If upon receipt of a Summons a charge payer contacts the Council and agrees to a special arrangement, the agreement will be confirmed in writing.

Should the account not be settled by the Court Hearing date, the Council will make an application for a Liability Order plus costs. This includes cases where a special arrangement has been made.

The Council encourages charge payers to contact prior to the Court Hearing date in order to pay in full, make an arrangement or resolve any queries.

Staff attending court will be fully prepared to assist those attending court for the Liability Order hearing and ensure they have a written breakdown of summons and Liability Order costs available.

If no arrangement is made to clear the Liability Order debt, the usual form of recovery would be to pass the case to the bailiff for collection.

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Should the debt fail to be recovered by the bailiff they will return the case to the Council so that the next form of recovery can be considered. For example, a petition for bankruptcy/liquidation/winding up may be sought. In the case of individual liability a means enquiry could be undertaken.

Bailiff/External Agency Recovery

When the services of Bailiffs/External Agency Recovery have been determined a service level agreement will exist along with formal written procedures specifying the standard of service to be provided and will cover the following matters:-

- The initial bailiff visit will be expected to be made at the earliest opportunity of receipt of the case.
- Specific procedures for the removal of goods.
- The Business Rates office applies a “fast track” method with the bailiff where the van bailiff proceeds with immediate effect.
- The Council should be able to access the external bailiffs system via a link in order to make enquiries.

Write Offs

Any charge payers debt which is identified for write off will be considered in accordance with the Bury Council's Corporate Write off Policy (See Appendix 7).

Overpaid Housing Benefit**Appendix 3**

An overpayment of Housing Benefit (HB) is any amount which has been paid but to which there was no entitlement. This includes any amount of

- Rent rebate or rent allowance paid in excess of entitlement
- Rent rebate credited to a rent account in advance of entitlement
- Rent allowance paid on account which is in excess of entitlement

The Benefits Manager on behalf of the Council has a duty to recover all outstanding amounts of overpaid Housing Benefit and Council Tax, and at all times staff within the Revenues Department will operate according to the Council's policy. However, some overpayments are irrecoverable; for example, those caused by official error where the claimant could not reasonably have known that they had been overpaid or where they had not contributed to the error.

Officers assessing claims will decide if the overpayment is recoverable at the time of processing the overpayment. Any overpayment considered irrecoverable will be referred to a senior officer for a final decision.

It is at the discretion of the Council whether to recover an overpayment. Where known, the personal circumstances of the claimant should be taken into account when deciding whether to recover the overpaid amount.

Who to recover from

When deciding who an LA can recover an overpayment they must.

- Decide whether the landlord has reported the overpayment in writing, and if so whether all criteria listed in HB Reg 101(1) have been satisfied.
 - If it has, then it can't be recovered from the landlord
 - If it hasn't, the LA must consider whether to seek recovery from the landlord when considering HB Reg 102 (2)
- Decide whether the overpayment was caused by an official error
 - If it was, the overpayment is only recoverable from the persons who could reasonably have been expected to realise they were being overpaid. This could be the landlord and claimant
 - If it wasn't, the LA must consider whether the overpayment was caused by someone who misrepresented or failed to disclose information.
- Decide who misrepresented or failed to disclose information.
 - If one person misrepresented or failed to disclose information, the overpayment would be recoverable from them
 - If more than one person misrepresented or failed to disclose information, the overpayment could be recoverable from both or either if
 - ~ One person was more at fault, recover from them
 - ~ Both people were equally at fault, recover from both of them

- No one misrepresent or failed to disclose information, the overpayment would be recoverable from the
 - ~ Claimant and
 - ~ Person to whom the overpayment was paid.

Once an LA decides on who an overpayment can legally be recovered from (this decision holds a right of appeal) they must then make a further decision on who they are actually going to recover from (this decision does not have a right of appeal). The Council will make this judgement based on evidence available to them at the time.

Recovery Methods

The Council can recover overpayments by any lawful means. One or more of the following methods of recovery may be employed dependant upon the individual circumstances of each case.

Recovery from Ongoing Benefit – Rent Allowance or Rent Rebate

Where a customer continues to receive Housing Benefit the Council will make deductions from ongoing payments of Housing Benefit having regard to their financial circumstances. Where appropriate the Council will recover debts at the weekly amounts set by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP).

As well as the above-mentioned rates of recovery, the Council will also increase deductions, where appropriate, by half (50%) of any of:-

- The earnings disregard, if applicable
- Regular charitable income or voluntary payments, if applicable
- War Disablement or War Widows Pension, if applicable.

In all above-mentioned cases, the recovery amounts are subject to an overall maximum deduction, which does not reduce the benefit payable to less than £0.50 pence.

In addition the Council can ask another Council to recover overpaid benefit on its behalf.

The Overpayment notification letter provides information to the claimants about the overpayments and their appeal rights.

Invoice

If HB is no longer in payment then the person who is to be held responsible for repayment will be issued with an Invoice for payment in full within 14 days.

If after 15 days we have had no contact then a reminder notice will be issued.

If after a further 15 days we have had no contact then we will attempt to contact them by to arrange a repayment but if this is unsuccessful then a Final Notice will be issued.

If the customer contacts us and a suitable re-payment arrangement is made then the following payments methods will be accepted: -

- Cheque/debit card
- Standing Order
- At any Post office or shop with a Pay point sign by using a barcode
- At any Council payment office or library
- Over the internet at www.Bury.gov.uk

If after 30 days we have had no contact we will attempt to try and recover the overpayment by one of the following methods.

The recovery of fraud overpayments are prioritised by interviewing claimants immediately after they have been issued with a Formal Caution or Administration Penalty and making arrangements with them to clear the debt. The Council's Benefit Fraud manager may make use of the Proceeds of Crime Act to try and secure any assets that are deemed to have been accumulated through criminal activity

Deduction from certain DWP benefits

The Council may ask the DWP Debt Management Office to recover a Housing Benefit (HB) overpayment by deduction from certain DWP benefits, as prescribed by Regulation.

Where necessary entitlement to benefits will be identified through the Customer Information System (CIS) connected to the Department for Works and Pensions Database.

Debt Recovery Agency

The overpayments can also be sent to a debt recovery agency that will phone and write to the claimant to try and get an arrangement to pay. If no contact/arrangement is made a doorstep visit will be made. This is all within a service level agreement we have with the debt recovery agency.

County Court action

Where standard recovery action has failed to recover the debt, it may be recovered in the County Court. An application for an order will have to be made and this allows us to attempt the following recovery action. Recovery via

- Attachment of Earnings,
- Garnishee Order,
- Bailiff or
- Charging order (enforcing the sale of a property).

These action's and the obtaining of the County Court order all incur added costs which are payable by the debtor.

Tracing Nonpayer's

All available resources will be used to trace nonpayer's including data matching options, Experian searches, and utilisation of the DWP Customer Information System. External Tracing Agents may also be deployed when all other avenues have been explored and it is cost effective to do so.

Write Off

Write-Off action will be taken in accordance with the principles set out in the Council's Corporate Write off Policy. (See Appendix 7)

The Housing Benefit Overpayment Officer will retain details of all outstanding overpayments where benefit is no longer in payment, in the event of future benefit being awarded, enabling recovery in the future.

Council Policy

To ensure compliance with the restrictions within the Council car parks and the Borough highways the Council is authorised to issue Penalty Charge Notices to vehicles parked in contravention of the restrictions as stated in the Traffic Management Act 2004.

Policies specific to Parking Enforcement

Penalty Charge Notices (PCNS) will be issued to contravening vehicles whenever an enforcement officer deems it necessary.

The recovery of the fines is the responsibility of Parking Services and for reasons of segregation of duties and safety, the enforcement officers are not allowed to take payment for the PCNS they issue.

Collection of penalty charges will be in accordance with the Traffic Management Act 2004.

Through-out the life of the PCN, Parking Services should make every attempt to recover the amount due at every stage in the proceedings.

The Council has the discretion to cancel a Notice for various reasons and therefore not proceed with the fine. The powers of discretion in these cases can only be exercised by the Car Parking Manager.

At all times the Council will act legally and promptly in all cases where payment is overdue.

Before a notice is passed to a bailiff for collection all statutory methods of enforcement must have been taken. Notice to owner, Charge certificate, and statutory declaration.

Where every effort has been made to recover up to the statutory declaration stage, Parking Services in conjunction with the Car Parking Manager will consider cases to be put forward for a warrant of execution.

Once the Court are happy that all the statutory steps have been taken and the warrant has been granted to the council further recovery action can be considered.

Should the office team not be able to collect the amount due then the warrant can be passed to one of the Council's bailiffs for collection.

Write-Off

If Parking Services and bailiffs have not been able to recovery the money the office team must consider the case to be listed as unable to recover and put onto a write off list to be considered and signed by the Executive Director of Resource. As well as the name, address and amount the list should also show the types of recovery action that have been taken. Write off action will be carried out in accordance with the Corporate Write off policy. (See Appendix 7)

Rent collection and arrears recovery is vital to the sustainability and financial viability of Six Town Housing. The service is delivered through our Rent Income Team which has a clear focus on :

- Developing a positive payment culture.
- Prevention and early intervention.
- Welfare and debt advice services.
- Timely intervention, including legal action where required.
- Provision of affordable credit and banking facilities through the credit union.
- Clear contact with tenants.

All customers whether in rent arrears or not have an equal right to a service that offers advice and assistance on how to maximize their income.

Policies specific to Rent Collection

Six Town Housing adopts a structured approach when dealing with tenants in rent arrears. There are clear stages that must be followed in every case with appropriate contacts.

Stage 1: Contact must be made within the first 2 weeks of rent arrears occurring. Ideally this would be within the first week as this will assist in debt prevention

Stage 2 : Contact with the tenant when they owe a maximum of 3 weeks rent but again ideally at two weeks rent, if stage 1 has failed to adequately resolve the situation.

Stage 3: Serve Notice of Seeking Possession (NSP) once the tenant owes 4 weeks rent, or £100 if four weeks payable rent is less than this. Tenant is advised with regard help available through external agencies.

Stage 4: An application to court for possession should be made immediately on expiry of the 28 day period specified in the NSP if payments are not maintained or the tenant has not made contact and made an acceptable offer to pay. Tenant is advised with regard help available through external agencies. All risk assessments are carried out.

Stage 5: A date for hearing the possession application will be set by the County Court. Tenant advised and invited in for an interview, where help will be provided to try and resolve any queries they may have.

Stage 6: On the court date a Rent Officer will attend and the tenant will be interviewed before the hearing where help will be provided to try and resolve any queries they may have. The outcome of the Court hearing will be recorded and a letter sent to the tenant.

Stage 7: If the tenant fails to maintain payments in line with the terms of a court order, contact will be made with the tenant to arrange a pre-eviction interview.

Stage 8: If the tenant does not pay as agreed , request an eviction warrant . All risk assessments are carried out.

Stage 9: Eviction date set by the court, inform the tenant.

It is important that the recovery procedure is followed and all the necessary checks are carried out when considering the next stage of action. It is important to discover all the facts from the customer when discussing rent arrears and debt advice should be given in appropriate cases. Where a tenant is known to have multiple debts we will work with external agencies for assistance where necessary. Referrals can be made at any stage and preferably as early as possible. Referrals should be made in any event at application to court and/or eviction application as per the Pre Court Protocol.

All our letters contain information where payments and help is available. We also have information on our website, with details of Housing Benefit and Citizens Advice Bureau surgeries and appointments that can be made at Six Town Housing.

Write-Offs

Write-Off action will be taken in accordance with the principles set out in the Council's Corporate Write off Policy (See Appendix 7)

Council Policy

The Executive Director of Resources on behalf of the Council has a duty to recover all outstanding amounts.

It is essential to maintain Council services offered by recovering any costs for those services provided. It is imperative that invoices are paid to ensure the continuance of services.

Policies Specific to Sundry Debts

Sundry nonpayer invoices are raised by whichever department is responsible for provision of the service provided. A full individual's name or company name and address, including postcode is required. Invoices should be charged to the correct cost centre and VAT code. A detailed description of the service should be provided. Authorised other evidence and details of the relevant legislation applicable must be retained by the originating Department in order to provide an audit trail confirming the debt raised is valid and to enable the original documents to be used if applicable for court proceedings.

The responsibility for the billing, collection and recovery of sundry nonpayer demands is held by the Corporate Director of Finance & Corporate Governance.

A sundry nonpayer debt can be cancelled at any stage of recovery action providing the proper procedures are followed.

Service providers must endeavour to obtain payment in advance or at the time of service delivery wherever possible.

At all times the Council will act legally and promptly in all cases where payment is overdue. Invoices will be issued promptly with sufficient information to explain the charge. In the event of non - payment a reminder will be issued. If payment is still not made, a Letter Before Action (LBA) will be issued.

Debts at LBA stage may be reviewed by a member of the Sundry Debtor's team, who will decide on the progression of the debt based upon the debt type, amount, previous recovery history and legally appropriate recovery methods.

If the debt has been deemed to be recoverable, the Sundry Debtor's team will review the debt and the next steps to be taken in accordance with the Council's Vulnerable Person's Policy. This may include the use of Experian where appropriate to carry out financial/ historical searches and the Insolvency Services website to check that the non - payer is not bankrupt. The use of Experian for searches will be monitored by the Collections and investigations Manager. A Land Registry search to verify property ownership may also be carried out at this stage.

After the methods discussed above have been exhausted, where legally permissible, the provision of future services to the non - payer may be suspended until outstanding debts are settled after discussion with the appropriate service manager.

If a LBA has been issued, and if after the specified time payment has not been made, a County Court Claim may be issued. Alternatively, the debt may be referred to a debt collection agency to collect the debt on behalf of the council. Should a County Court Claim be issued, this will result in a County Court Judgment (CCJ) being lodged. This may affect an individual's credit rating and make any type of future credit agreement difficult. It should be noted that once a County Court Claim has been issued, Court costs and interest will be added to the debt.

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Once a CCJ has been obtained, the Council will act to enforce it, which may include an attachment of earnings order, bailiff action to seize goods to the value of the debt, an order to attend Court for questioning, bankruptcy proceedings (for debts above £750), High Court Sheriff collection, Garnishee Order or outside debt collection agents visiting the property.

A charging order may be obtained on the non-payer's property, which will remain in place until the property is sold, although this may be enforced sooner by proceeding with an order for sale.

To prevent any of the recovery action shown above, it is important that contact is made between the non-payer and the Council to seek reasons for non payment. If appropriate and agreeable with the Sundry Debtor's Team, instalment agreements can be arranged depending on individual circumstances.

If the debt is deemed as non-recoverable, the Customer Accounts Team leader will apply the write - off procedure (See Appendix 7).

Ownership of all Sundry Debts rests with the originating departments. It is their responsibility to:

- Issue an instruction to cancel an invoice, using a credit note request form.
- Correspond with or discuss with the non-payer issues relating to the validity of the debt; and determine what, if any, services should be provided to non-payers who are in arrears. The Sundry Debtors Team will provide reports to the originating Departments on a regular basis as to the value of their outstanding accounts with a monthly report showing the status of debts raised by each department.
- Request that any debt be written off.

It is the responsibility of the service department to determine how to supply services to a non-payer who is already in arrears. However, prior to a Council service being withdrawn completely from a non-payer, the service Department must identify if the service can be legally stopped and then contact the nonpayer to explain the action about to be taken and the reasons behind it.

Where a non-payer has legally passed on his/her responsibility of their finances to their representative, the representative will be held liable for all charges incurred by the customer. In the event of non payment the Council will pursue recovery of monies owed against the appointed representative. This may result in Court action to recover any outstanding sums.

Cancellation of Sundry Debt Invoice

Where a charge has been found to be incorrectly raised, in full or part, it is the responsibility of the originating department to raise a credit note to cancel, or reduce, the original charge.

The department should complete a credit note request form, detailing the reasons for the cancelation/reduction, duly signed by an authorised officer, and keep the details available for inspection by internal audit as required.

Write Offs

The Sundry Debtors Team will provide the following details to the Executive Director of Finance to enable that officer to decide on whether or not to write off a debt:

- Non-payer reference
- Total sum
- Reason for debt
- Action taken to date to recover the Sundry Debt which is identified for write off will be considered in accordance with the Council's Corporate Write Off Policy (See Appendix 7).

The Council recognises that there will be instances where there will be credit balances on accounts and as such reference is made to the Write On Policy (See Appendix 7). This will apply to all of the debt types as set out within this document.

Corporate Debt Case Studies

Case Study 1.

Customer is a single parent with two children, a little girl aged 4 and a young boy diagnosed with autism aged 9 years. She is in receipt of income support of £71.70 and also receives £114.00 child tax credit and £33.70 child benefit per week.

The case was referred from Bury CAB who were helping the customer deal with multiple debt issues. However they were very concerned as the customer had been served notice at the tenancy where the customer and her family were living and they were at serious risk of becoming homeless. Her private landlord had sold the property and the customer was struggling to find alternative affordable housing in the area.

The customer suffers with anxiety and depression and was clearly struggling to cope. She was also very concerned of the potential negative impact that changing her son's school would have on her son's health condition, if she was forced to do this.

As a result of a single case ownership approach the corporate debt manager took responsibility as the single point of contact to deal with all the multiple complex issues and fantastic outcomes have been achieved.

The customer had got deeper into debt when she was using her income support to contribute to rent payments and she became reliant on pay day loans to maintain her essential living expenses and before she knew it her debts were spiralling out of control. She has now successfully applied for a Debt Relief Order which has reduced her personal debt by £8,000 and brought an end to costly pay day loans.

With the right advice and support in place the customer has been able to successfully secure appropriate housing with Six Town Housing. It is close to her son's school and therefore removing the risks of negative impacts on his health. This was achieved without the customer actually being made homeless and needing the local authority to provide and pay for emergency housing for the family.

The customer has been given clear budgeting advice and has voluntarily engaged with the family support programme who will help embed her new budgeting skills in order to prevent further problems.

The customer already had an NVQ level 3 in child care, she is now being supported with a refresher skills and confidence building course and there is already a marked improvement in her health. The customer is being supported to reach her goals and is working towards becoming a self-employed child-minder by the year end.

Other outcomes include – In order to reduce the impacts of under occupancy until her son's 10th birthday - An award of DHP has been awarded as this is a temporary situation and the customer is also actively helping herself.

The customer is hoping to be in sustainable employment which accommodates the needs of her family before her income support ends when her youngest child becomes five. Therefore preventing future stress and anxiety, removing future risks and avoiding potential sanctions.

Case Study 2.

Customer is a married man living in a Six Town Housing property with his wife and two dependent children, a boy aged nine and a girl aged five.

The case was referred by the strategic case conference review board as the customer had increasing debts across the council, including £1,151.81 Council Tax arrears and £502.32 rent arrears. The family was also impacted on as result of the under-occupancy charges.

The customer was working until he has an accident in March 2013, due to his ill-health he was no longer fit for work and made a claim to employment and support allowance. His other income is made up of £110 child tax credits and £33.40 child benefit.

A full review of the customer's circumstances was carried out and several things came to light. Although he had applied for employment and support allowance at the right time, it was never actually awarded. Despite ongoing telephone calls to DWP the customer was not able to get his benefits sorted out. As a result the only income available for the family to live off was the child tax credits and child benefit.

In order to help this customer deal with his debts we needed to make sure he had the means in place to pay. A full update on benefit entitlement was given and due to his improved health the customer feels he is now fit and available for work. He agreed to attend the local library to complete his online application as he does not have access to the internet at home. When I followed up his progress it came to light a second visit had been needed as he had struggled and it had taken longer than expected.

A backdated claim to housing benefit and council tax support has submitted which if awarded will reduce this customers debt with the council by approx £1,300.

As the customer is actively taking positive action to address his situation a Discretionary Housing Payment has been awarded to help support the family in the short term. The customer is getting help from the CAB to apply for a backdated payment of Employment and Support Allowance.

On-going budgeting advice is being provided and payment arrangements have been put in place for his outstanding Council Tax and rent arrears. The customer agreed he would benefit with some additional support in order to reduce risks of the increasing sanctions being imposed on people. The National Careers Service who are now working in partnership with Customer Support and Collections and are working with the customer to support him back to work.

Case Study 3.

Customer is a single lady who is suffering from anxiety and depression who currently lives in a Six Town Housing property. The customer has lived at the property for 28 years and her children have now grown up and left the family home. The customer has been admitted to hospital on a couple of occasions in the last two years when she has attempted suicide.

The case was referred from the under- occupancy team as the customer has mounting debts across the council including Council Tax arrears of £2,296.74 and rent arrears of £1,367.40. The team grew increasingly concerned when this customer threatened suicide whilst on the premises at Six Town Housing when being interviewed about her rent arrears and she has stated she is not prepared to move from her home.

Although an application was made for a Discretionary Housing Payment an award was not made, as it was not thought that this short term fix would enable any long term positive solution. A corporate debt approach was adopted to offer an alternative approach tailored to meet the needs of the customer.

The customer is currently in receipt of employment and support allowance of £71.70 per week which is paid fortnightly. The customer receives £69.77 of Housing Benefit per week towards her rent which is currently £93.03. As a result of the under occupancy charge the customer is expected to make up the weekly shortfall of £23.26 out of her ESA. This would leave the customer with £48.44 per week to live off and this is without allowing any contributions to meet her priority debts and is therefore clearly not manageable.

Previous to this recent significant decline in mental health she held down full time employment, managed her mental health condition and coped with everyday life.

Some quality time was needed with this customer to start to build trust and explore how she could start to effectively deal with her current situation aiming for long term solutions.

The customers preferred option would be to secure paid employment this would then reduce the impact of all the other issues she faces but she accepts she will need support to reach this goal.

We agreed that a family support key worker was her best option to provide ongoing consistent support for twelve months and I agreed to put this voluntary support in place for her. Funding can be secured from the private sector to provide access to training to improve skills and increase confidence. An application has been made to United Utilities trust fund for a grant to clear outstanding debts of £2,500 with them. Further action in respect of her rent and Council Tax have been put on hold and minimum arrangements have been put in place to deal with these priority debts. As long as these arrangements are maintained there will be no further action at this time. In order for the customer to effectively manage the arrangements they have been aligned to her benefit payday. As the customer now has a clear way forward and is actively doing something about her situation, an award of DHP has been made, increasing her income by £23.26 per week.

This customer was suffering serious social and financial exclusion and because of her declining health was at serious risk, if she had just been left unable to cope. Although we

cannot predict what the future holds we have given her a clear way forward and are providing the positive support needed to help her make the transition back to work.

Discretionary Housing Payments – 2013

The Discretionary Housing Payment scheme provides a small amount of funding to deal with anomalies and hardship in situations where normal Housing Benefit does not cover all the rent.

This policy contains general principles which officers, who are responsible for processing applications for Discretionary Housing Payments follow. It should be stressed that this is a guide only and is not prescriptive or exhaustive. Each case should be considered on its own merits. Underpinning the policy is a general criteria that successful applicants must be doing all they can to alleviate their own situation.

To qualify for some consideration for assistance under this scheme the customer must already qualify for some Housing Benefit.

From April 2013 the government is providing extra funding to ease the introduction of the household benefit cap but also to meet continuing and unavoidable needs resulting from the application of size criteria in the social rented sector rather than catering for these in the Housing Benefit scheme itself.

Many people have difficulty paying their rent. Among these are

- those whose benefit is restricted because their rent is considered too high
- those whose benefit is restricted because their home is considered too large under the government's size criteria
- those whose benefit is reduced by deductions for non-dependants who may not contribute adequately to cover those deductions
- those whose benefit is reduced by the taper for excess income
- those who for all sorts of reasons have other calls on their income (additional expenses or outstanding debts) which they prioritise ahead of rent
- those who are returning to work after a long period of unemployment who have difficulty in managing finances during the transition from benefit to a stable in-work income
- those who are in affordable housing but at risk of becoming homeless due to difficulty in meeting their full rent liability because of severe financial difficulties resulting from the effects

of the current economic climate or their attempts to take up paid employment

Awards of Discretionary Housing Payments should focus on enabling people to secure or retain and pay for appropriate and sustainable accommodation through temporary difficulties or in circumstances not addressed by the benefit system. This is in order to reduce the risk of homelessness and support the stability of families and communities.

Discretionary Housing Payments should not seek to undermine the purpose and nature of the Housing Benefit scheme, nor support irresponsible behaviour, nor should they assist in situations so common that a consistent approach to such payments would involve expenditure above the maximum permissible.

The Council therefore expects payments to be made in unusual or extreme circumstances where additional help with current rent will have a significant effect in alleviating hardship, reducing the risk of homelessness or alleviating difficulties that may be experienced in the transition from long term benefit dependence into work, for example:

- Circumstances unusual/exceptional among customers in that tenure
- Costs that are beyond their control and do not arise through the actions or failures of others
- Housing choices which are forced on or required by the customer because of urgency, care needs or significant health requirements
- Tenants whose benefit has been restricted because their home is considered too large under the government's size criteria and are actively looking to move into smaller accommodation e.g. tenants who have sought the advice of the Councils Housing Options team and may be on the waiting list to move to a smaller property
- Extreme and temporary situations which make it difficult to move in the short term or where decisions had to be made in an emergency
- Imminent loss of the home where meeting some or all of the current shortfall between the benefit and eligible rent will prevent the customer from becoming homeless. However in considering awards under this provision the Council will have regard to

- the reasons that the debts arose
- the involvement of other advisory services engaged in providing assistance to the customer to manage debt in order that any arrangement to accommodate agreements for repayment of debt might be realistically obtained and sustained.
- whether any proposed Discretionary Housing Payment award will have the desired effect of preventing the customer from becoming homeless
- the consequences of any potential increased demand on the fund in the event that the award was not made (such as having to move from affordable accommodation into highly priced private sector accommodation with reduced security of tenure)
- temporary hardship and difficulties which may arise during the transition for those who are coming off long term benefits into work.

The Council may also provide temporary assistance in the early months of a tenancy where a claimant has moved from homelessness provision and additional help is likely to increase the chances that the claimant will sustain a stable and secure home.

Awards of Discretionary Housing Payments

Awards are expected to be made to meet current needs rather than past debts. No significant degree of payment for past periods is anticipated as requests for payment should be made promptly within the benefit period of the main benefit to which they relate and within a reasonable time of knowing the outcome of a claim for the main benefit.

Awards are expected to last for a short fixed period, depending on the individual circumstances. Given the limited scope of the scheme and the funding available, awards are expected to be at a modest level other than for very short periods in extreme circumstances. Awards to claimants with high rents are unlikely to be made

The Council recognises that a small proportion of awards will need to continue for longer periods, particularly where the current home has been significantly adapted to meet the needs of a family member with substantial and continuing disability.

Decisions on the level and duration of awards will also take account of what is affordable within the agreed budget, bearing in mind that the level of grant available is decided nationally by the Department for Work and Pensions rather than on the basis of any local assessment of need.

The Council expects to give higher priority to assisting people to retain an established home and to relieving temporary difficulties where the arrangement is likely to be sustainable longer term; and low priority to assisting people who take on housing costs which because of the nature, location or price of the property, are unaffordable and unsustainable from the start.

The Council recognises that some social sector tenants affected by the size criteria after April 2013 will live in properties that have been substantially adapted structurally to meet needs arising from severe and persisting disability or because of such disability will depend on the care and support of relatives and friends in the immediate vicinity. If it is unreasonable to expect the claimant to move in the short to medium term, awards of Discretionary Housing Payment, if appropriate, may be of much longer duration than usually expected.

In addition, where resources allow, the Council may also assist other social sector tenants affected by the size criteria if it would be beneficial for them to stay in the property because of the care and support they provide in, or other recognised contribution to, the immediate community.

The Council recognises the difficulties faced by absent parents who regularly look after children normally living with the other parent or who hope to make such arrangements. The benefit system does not provide for this situation. It is a common situation. The Council will therefore only rarely be able to assist with discretionary payments, mainly where existing arrangements are threatened by difficulties that are likely to be short-lived.

The Council recognises that welfare reform changes greatly increase the number of claimants who face a reduction of Housing Benefit that will be of relatively short duration such that it is unreasonable to expect them to move. This will most commonly be

- Where a social sector tenant is affected by the size criteria but will shortly reach the age for state Pension Credit and so become exempt from the restriction.
- Where at the start of a size restriction, an imminent birthday of a family member will increase the room requirement under the size criteria
- Where a single woman or couple expecting their first child live in two bedroom accommodation suitable for their new family while still assessed on the one-bedroom or shared accommodation rate. (This would apply where the family were already in social

sector accommodation but newly affected by the size criteria or where private tenants move to larger accommodation relatively late in the pregnancy.)

- Where a single private tenant in one-bedroom accommodation is restricted to the shared room rate of Local Housing Allowance but will shortly be 35 and thus exempt from it

In making decisions on discretionary payments, the Council expects also to be mindful of incentives to responsible behaviour, for example in the choice of a home or engagement in activities to address worklessness, debt or problematic behaviour.

Where a request for payments has been refused, it is not expected that repeated requests will be considered unless the customer can demonstrate that the situation has worsened significantly or a substantial period of time has elapsed.

Circumstances where the Council can not make an award

Regulations provide that the Council can not make an award of Discretionary Housing Payment if the customer is not in receipt of an award of Housing Benefit.

A Discretionary Housing Payment can not be made to accommodate the cost of any services which are not eligible for help under the Housing Benefit scheme such as

- ineligible service charges,
- water & sewerage,
- fuel
- heating charges.

It is not normally expected that Discretionary Housing Payment payments will be made because of

- significant overcharging by a landlord
- the ordinary impact of rent restriction either resulting from a Rent Officer decision or the use of Local Housing Allowance rates
- the preference for a size or type of accommodation or location which is not strictly necessary for pressing reasons

- the failure of non-dependants to make up the deduction attributable to them when they have the means to do so
- the inadequacy of benefits for disability to cover the costs of disability towards which they are paid
- the unwillingness of the customer to use other available resources or to apply for other more appropriate forms of assistance
a move from social sector accommodation to unaffordable private accommodation, other than for the most compelling of reasons
- a move to private rented accommodation where it should be clear to the claimant that the property is too large or unaffordable
- an increase in rent to cover rent arrears
- certain sanctions and reductions in benefits

The Council is aware of calls for discretionary funding to cover the cost of deposits and advance rent to assist a person to move to affordable accommodation. Given the limited nature of the funding available and the risk of landlords levying such costs where they may presently waive them, the Council would not normally expect to help with items of this sort. It is also possible to use Discretionary Housing Payments to help with removal costs and other expenses associated with moving. The limited funding available makes it unlikely that the Council can afford to help in this way given its priority of assisting people to remain in existing homes where appropriate but will keep this under review in the context of awards and expenditure, particularly for situations where it would release larger social sector accommodation.

How to claim a Discretionary Housing Payment

A claim for a Discretionary Housing Payments must be made in writing and signed by the customer. A letter or signed statement made at a designated office will be deemed as sufficient.

On request or in appropriate circumstances, the Council will issue the customer with a Discretionary Housing Payments application form. Alternatively a form can be downloaded from the Councils web pages.

The customer will be required to return the form to a designated office within one month of its issue and will be encouraged to include any relevant supporting evidence. However the one month time limit can be

extended at the discretion of the Council.

The Council may request any (reasonable) evidence in support of an application for a Discretionary Housing Payments. The customer will be asked to provide the evidence within one month of such a request although this will be extended in appropriate circumstances.

The Council reserves the right to verify any information or evidence provided by the customer in appropriate circumstances.

The Council will seek to maximise the customer's income by checking the availability of state benefits and other sources of financial assistance that may be available to the customer upon application

Changes in circumstances

The Council may need to revise an award of Discretionary Housing Payments where the customer's circumstances have changed.

As applications for Discretionary Housing Payments must be in receipt of Housing Benefit, they remain under a general requirement to inform the Council about any changes in their circumstances that might affect their claim for Housing Benefit

Overpayments

In the event that a Discretionary Housing Payment is found to have been overpaid, officers will consider whether it is appropriate to recover it in full, in part or not at all. As a general rule the Benefits Section will seek to recover any Discretionary Housing Payment found to be overpaid. Normally this will involve issuing an invoice to the customer or the person to whom the award was paid. However, if the overpayment was caused by an official error and it is not reasonable for the customer to have known that they were being overpaid, recovery of the overpayment may not be sought

The right to seek a Review

Discretionary Housing Payments are not payments of Housing Benefits and are therefore not subject to the statutory appeals procedure. However, all Councils are expected to set up an appropriate review process.

The Council will operate the following policy for dealing with requests to review a decision not to award a Discretionary Housing Payment, a decision to award a reduced or lesser amount of Discretionary Housing Payment, a decision not to backdate a Discretionary Housing Payment or a decision that there has been an overpayment of a Discretionary Housing Payment.

A customer (or their appointee or agent) who disagrees with a Discretionary Housing Payment decision may dispute the decision. A request for a review shall be delivered in writing to a designated office within one calendar month of the written Discretionary Housing Payment decision being issued to the customer.

A Senior Officer, who has not been involved in the case previously, will then consider the request and review the decision made, to ensure that it was reasonable. The customer (or their appointee or agent) will be informed of decision in writing.

This decision will be final and binding and may only be challenged via the judicial review process or by complaint to the Local Government ombudsman.

Publicity

The Benefits Service will publicise the scheme and will work with all interested parties to achieve this. In particular the Housing Options Team, Citizens Advice Bureau, housing associations, Six Towns Housing and voluntary sector organisations. A copy of this policy statement will be made available for inspection and will be posted on the Councils web site. Information about the amount spent will not normally be made available except at the end of the financial year.

Fraud

The Council is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. A customer who tries to fraudulently claim a Discretionary Housing Payment by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006. Where it is alleged, or the Council suspects that such a fraud may have been committed, the matter will be investigated and if fraud is found to have occurred, action will be taken including the recovery of overpaid monies and, if appropriate, criminal proceedings.

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Poverty Strategy

2013 - 2016



**Team
Bury**

Working Together For A Better Bury

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Welcome to the Team Bury Poverty Strategy

I am pleased to present the Poverty Strategy for Bury 2013-2016. At a national level, it is now a statutory requirement for all local authorities to tackle child poverty and in Bury we feel that to achieve this we must look at poverty across all our communities.

Bury is a rapidly growing and changing borough with pockets of severe poverty and deprivation. The continued demographic changes that the borough is projected to experience, combined with the impacts of the financial recession and Welfare Reform, makes addressing poverty more important than ever. The key to successfully reducing, and lessening the effects of, poverty in Bury will be a joined-up approach across Team Bury that maximises support to our residents. Team Bury includes, Bury College, Bury Council, Bury Third Sector Development Agency (B3SDA), Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue, Greater Manchester Police, Greater Manchester Probation Trust, Holy Cross College, Job Centre Plus - Greater Manchester District, NHS Bury, Pennine Care NHS Trust and Six Town Housing.

Taking into consideration the challenging economic climate and with fewer resources available, a partnership approach is more important than ever, and all partners have a contribution to make to tackling poverty, and better communication between organisations can deliver better outcomes for those affected by poverty. Information, best practice and resources can be shared across the partnership organisations resulting in better consistency and effectiveness in our approach to tackling poverty in Bury.

It is well recognised that poverty has a detrimental effect on future life chances and experiencing poverty in childhood can impact on a child's educational attainment, life chances, health, and safety. However, breaking the cycle of poverty is not only about improving future opportunities, but also addressing the impacts of poverty. We need to continue to support people to get back into work, and ensure that low-income earning residents have the resources they need to support their families.

Our Vision in Bury is to reduce poverty by 2020 through a multi-agency approach that tackles both the causes and consequences of poverty.



Cllr Mike Connolly
**Leader of
Bury Council**

Introduction

Team Bury defines poverty as when people's income does not meet the costs of the material, cultural and social resources that are regarded as necessary to provide a minimum acceptable quality of life in Bury.

When we talk about poverty, we often focus on those people in the world living in absolute poverty, without the resources needed to feed themselves or their family. It can be difficult to identify what we mean by poverty in our own communities, and, indeed, those people who we may identify as living in poverty would rarely consider themselves to be so.

In 2008/09 5.3 million people were suffering from multiple disadvantages in the UK, 1.9 million children lived in workless households, 2.8 million children were in relative income poverty (where incomes are 60% of the median household income), 2.2 million children were in both low income and material deprivation and 1.6 million children were in absolute poverty. There are now 1.8 million pensioners living in poverty which represents 16% of UK pensioners.

It is felt that changes in the benefits system, increases in the cost of living, rising unemployment and fewer job opportunities may have an impact on the levels of poverty. There is an increased necessity to do all we can to reduce poverty which will be challenging because of the reduction in funding for public services, and this will impact on what services and support will be available to our residents.

Some families and groups experience the 'cycle of poverty' which is repeated from generation to generation. Living in a poor family as a child and then as adults they are more likely to suffer from ill-health, be unemployed and homeless, become involved in offending, drug and alcohol abuse, and abusive relationships. However, there are some that may have experienced a change in lifestyle such as redundancy or experienced other life events that impact on their cost of living e.g. birth of a child, caring responsibilities.

Our strategic objectives are:

- **Managing the money** – Many residents find it difficult to manage their finances and in need of advice to deal with debt issues.
- **Claiming what is due** – Residents requiring advice to ensure they claim the benefits they are entitled to.
- **Work works** – Assisting those people who are able to work back into employment.
- **Breaking the cycle** – Preventing the intergenerational cycle of poverty that people are born into.
- **Strategic issues** – Ensuring that Team Bury implement, monitor and evaluate the action plan by keeping poverty high on the agenda.
- **Every contact counts** – Ensuring residents are able to access all Team Bury services and confidently sign post when required.

Background

Child Poverty Act 2010

The Child Poverty Act 2010 requires local authorities to produce child poverty strategies and work with local partners to reduce and prevent child poverty in their area. The scale of the task and the action needed is clearly greater for those areas with the highest rates of child poverty.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 established four separate targets to be met nationally by 2020/21:

- Relative poverty – to reduce the proportion of children who live in relative low income (in families with income below 60 per cent of the median) to less than 10 per cent
- Combined low income and material deprivation – to reduce the proportion of children who live in material deprivation and have a low income to less than 5 per cent
- Persistent poverty – to reduce the proportion of children that experience long periods of relative poverty, with the specific target to be set at a later date; and
- Absolute poverty – to reduce the proportion of children who live below an income threshold fixed in real terms to less than 5 per cent

Two independent reviews have been completed since the Act became law:

Frank Field’s Independent Review of Poverty and Life Chances (December 2010)

The report recommended that the Government should give focus on the Foundation Years (0-5) and that a set of Life Chances Indicators (LCIs) should be established. The review also proposes that local authorities should create sets of LCIs to correspond with the national indicators.

Graham Allen’s Independent Report: Early Intervention: The Next Steps (January 2011)

This report focussed on early intervention and the need for responsible parties to work together to prevent late intervention which is both expensive and ineffective.

National Child Poverty Strategy

The Government published the first National Child Poverty Strategy in April 2011 which aims to eradicate child poverty by 2020 by improving the life chances of children, protecting vulnerable families and reducing the nation’s fiscal deficit.

Poverty in Bury

Bury has a population of 185,100 and in 2008/09, 18.2% of Bury's residents were in poverty according to the official definition of poverty. The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) ranked Bury as the 97th most deprived district area in 2004 and this has improved to 114th in 2010. Bury continues to be the 3rd least deprived authority in Greater Manchester (GM) behind Stockport and Trafford.

Older People in Poverty

According to Office for National Statistics (ONS) Bury currently has 34,340 individuals claiming a state pension, which accounts for 19% of the total population and is expected to rise to over 25% by 2050. The number of Bury residents claiming Pensions Credits has reduced by 5% between 2008 and 2011 however the benefits payment has increased by 15%. People living on pensions very often have a fixed income which can mean increases in the prices of essentials such as fuel and food significantly reduce their available income.

Education and Early Years

Child poverty is strongly linked to problems in later life including educational attainment. In Bury 13.7% of the total school population receive free school meals and are more likely to become Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) three years after completing compulsory education. In September 2011, 555 young people were NEET (between the ages of 16 and 18 years). This is also associated with negative outcomes such as having a criminal record, poor health, teenage parenthood and negative psychological outcomes.

Economy

In December 2012 there were 1,905 long-term unemployed (six months plus) Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) claimants in Bury which is above the national average. The average earnings of a full-time worker living in Bury are £26,111 per annum which is above the Greater Manchester average. However, the average earnings of a part-time worker are lower than the Greater Manchester average and the numbers of part-time workers has increased since 2005, meaning that more residents will be earning less.

Income

The average house price in Bury has risen by 112% between 1995 and 2012 whilst household incomes have reduced since 2008. There is now a greater risk of households falling into relative poverty which can potentially impact the physical and mental health of members of the household.

Health

Bury has comparatively low levels of Incapacity Benefit (IB)/Employment Support Allowance (ESA) claimants and is third lowest in Greater Manchester. Bury experiences problems with obesity and drug and alcohol misuse which affects individual life chances. In terms of fitness, we offer a means tested Active Lifestyle Discount Card which provides subsidised leisure. Bury has above the national average proportion of mothers smoking during pregnancy. In May 2011, 43% of IB/ESA claimants claim on mental health grounds.

Target Groups

To tackle poverty Team Bury partnership organisations needs to understand both its starting point and how it wants to improve. Measuring poverty is not easy: Many of the national measures are not available at a local level, or are not provided frequently enough to provide meaningful indicators of progress.

The over-arching target is “to reduce the number of Super Output Areas within Bury that rank within the most-deprived 25% of Super Output Areas in the country.”

Information on performance against this target would only be available every three to four years, as and when the national Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is published by central government. However the IMD is the primary recognised measure of deprivation used in this country, it allows comparisons to be made over time and with other areas, and is available at a small geographical level, allowing pockets of deprivation to be identified. This is particularly important for Bury as we do have these small areas where people are living in deprivation scattered right across the borough.

The target groups are:

1. Households living on benefits – working age jobless/workless including those with dependent children.
2. People in low-paid and/or low-skilled employment – the working poor.
3. Vulnerable adults living on fixed/low incomes and/or benefits – This would include the retired poor.

This will capture all residents who are living in poverty. This is particularly important as Team Bury is keen to ensure that its strategic outcome focuses on all residents in poverty, and not solely on children living in poverty, currently the main focus of current central government policy and initiatives.

It is important to note that much of the research, and the focus groups undertaken highlighted that people do not readily identify themselves as being in poverty. This is an important message which needs to inform our work to support the target groups.

Consultation

Residents' focus group

A focus group was carried out during the Poverty HIGHLIGHT Review involving ten people with different circumstances. The majority of the group defined poverty as when "you can't afford to eat or clothe yourself." The group suggested that one location for benefits advice, less confusing paperwork, confidence building courses, training in a non-formal environment, flexible jobs that fitted around childcare and free childcare would help their current situation.

Partnership Workshop

A workshop was held in September 2011 involving staff from Team Bury organisations. As well as partnership organisations, children and young people, people during moments of need, lone parents, neighbouring authorities, children's centres, schools and colleges, service users and Revenues and Benefits should be involved in future consultation. A variety of methods were suggested.

The group also identified the need to link in with the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, work with housing services, signposting to agencies, financial and budget training, a targeted response is required, engagement with families in crisis, 'self help', incentives to improve life, fuel poverty awareness and bringing work into bury employment sites.

Focus Groups

A number of focus groups were held in February 2012 with young people, people living on benefits and people with disabilities. All of the groups involved agreed that poverty is an issue in Bury and that they were personally aware of people in poverty. The groups gave very similar responses regarding what they felt poverty was and how it could be reduced.

The groups provided many views as to how the issue of poverty can be resolved including targeting children to break the cycle of poverty, financial support, counselling, more apprenticeships, and support with finding employment, charity fundraising opportunities and more assistance for people with disabilities to re-train for jobs. The majority of responses were centred on finance, employment and training, and the benefits system.

What have we done so far...

Highlight Review

Team Bury undertook an intensive six-week review of poverty within the borough in 2009-10. The aim of the review was to establish what current interventions were in place, how effective these interventions have been and what recommendations could be made to improve the services and sharing of information and best practice. It would release energy from communities, front line workers and partners could design new approaches. The group were able to identify barriers that required further improvement. The findings have been incorporated into this strategy. The review concluded that the areas that needed to be addressed were strategic issues, benefits claims, worklessness, and communication with communities, breaking the poverty cycle and managing financial awareness.

A focus group with residents was undertaken as part of the HIGHLIGHT review. The discussion points were around defining poverty and the barriers improving the situation. Consultation with Team Bury partnership organisations took place following the review to assess the direction of the needs assessment and strategy.

Needs Assessment

An in-depth poverty needs assessment has been completed and this accompanies the strategy. The assessment focussed on the following areas:

- Education
- Economy and Employment
- Income
- Lifestyle/General Health
- Mental Health

Further consultation has taken place and will continue to take place with partnership organisations, residents and stakeholders.

Issues Arising

Universal Credit

In November 2010 Government presented the Universal Credit: Welfare That Works White Paper that lays out plans for a fundamental welfare reform with the aim of reducing welfare dependency, to ensure that 'work pays and is always seen to pay'. Elements of the new Universal Credit system will be implemented from 2013 onwards and is envisaged to combat worklessness and poverty. It will replace the current working age means tested benefits and will support those that go back to work. It will also provide a basic allowance with additional elements for children, disability, housing and caring.

Fuel poverty

In 2010 approximately 12,810 of the national proportion of properties were experiencing fuel poverty in Bury. Fuel poverty is caused by a combination of low incomes, expensive energy and energy-inefficient homes. Bury's Affordable Warmth Strategy 2011 - 2016 has been produced in line with the national targets set in the National Fuel Poverty Strategy 2001 but we are unlikely to eradicate fuel poverty by 2016 due to rising fuel prices and the recession. However, we have had many successful projects over the years since our original Strategy was produced in 2005 e.g. insulation schemes such as the 'Toasty Bury' scheme, winter warmth campaigns such as the 'Kill the Chill' and Bury Healthy Homes projects which have contributed towards achieving affordable warmth for Bury residents.

Troubled Families

The Supporting Communities, Improving Lives Programme builds on existing work both within Bury and across Greater Manchester to improve and reform public services, with the twin aims of reducing dependency/cost of public services and improving outcomes for those families who may be defined as troubled, complex or experiencing multiple problems. Essentially the programme focuses on those families who are known to, and receiving interventions from, a range of services. It will critically evaluate current services and aim to develop improved solutions to both address the needs of families currently meeting the criteria, and prevent families becoming complex in the future.

The programme addresses Team Bury's priority of "Managing complex needs in communities and neighbourhoods and promoting personal responsibility" and incorporates the delivery of Bury's commitment to the national Troubled Families programme.

Poverty Commission Report 2013

The Greater Manchester Poverty Commission published its findings on 15 January 2013 and calls for special measures which will assist more than 600,000 Greater Manchester residents who are experiencing the effects of extreme poverty. In addition, it calls for action to prevent nearly 1.6 million people (nearly half the population of Greater Manchester) sliding in to deeper poverty. Local authorities and others are encouraged to set up their own energy provider companies, credit unions and bulk food purchase 'supermarkets/foodbanks'. This would see shareholder profit replaced with reduced prices, social responsibility and greater benefit to the local community.



Our Strategic Objectives

Managing the Money

Living in poverty is stressful. There are competing demands on a limited income, and many residents find it difficult to manage their finances. The key areas of work include:

- Raising Financial Awareness – Giving people the skills to take responsibility for their own finances and understand the real cost of borrowing money, how to deal with creditors and planning for the future is invaluable in helping people to avoid and/or manage debt.
- Development of A Credit Union – Credit Unions offer an alternative and cheaper source of finance than private legal finance companies and illegal loan sharks, many of whom charge extremely high levels of interest.
- Reducing Demands – Partners in Team Bury need to develop an understanding of how their working practices can place demands on people living in poverty. Whether it is how we recover money we are owed, or how schools ask for money for school trips, we need to deliver a campaign and review of how we are placing residents under more stress.

Projects

Financial Inclusion and Worklessness Group – aims to improve the financial situation of tenants and residents of Bury via a range of approaches by establishing a commitment to address financial exclusion, creating pathways into work and training for the most isolated and vulnerable residents, connecting people to opportunities to gain the right skills to access good jobs, sharing best practice, combining resources to tackle common problems, developing new partnerships and embedding financial exclusion and worklessness into all aspects of the organisation.

Barclays Money Skills – Barclays Bank is working in partnership with charities to develop projects that build financial inclusion, financial capability and support enterprise. This initiative will provide opportunities for one million people build skills, increase knowledge and confidence to manage their money more effectively. The programme will equip teachers, youth workers and other charity practitioners, as well as Barclays' employees to deliver money management sessions as well as videos, games, a website and interactive digital content.

Bury Council/Six Town Housing Corporate Debt Policy – provides a clear, consistent and transparent approach to debt collection for the Council, Six Town Housing and its Third Sector partners. Our clear objective is to make sure that those have the means to pay do pay and those individuals / families in genuine crisis receive the targeted help and support they need to prevent increasing debts, promote personal capacity and create better life chances. High level case conferences will be introduced to a limited number of customers in

genuine need where there are multiple complex debts and multiple complex issues. The corporate debt policy will ensure a clear and consistent approach to corporate debt and make sure we are working together to support our most vulnerable.

Credit Union Project – We recognise how the welfare reform will have a negative impact on many of our most deprived families and individuals within the borough. Many of these facing the biggest impact are often excluded from affordable lending facilities and struggling to deal with debts. In order to prevent further deprivation it is essential that all people in the borough have access to affordable lending facilities and increase financial capacity. Bury council and Six Town housing have done a significant amount of joint work which has been fully supported by other partners. We have now successfully explored the potential and gained approval for a Credit Union to be established within the borough of Bury, in order to support our most vulnerable and help prevent further deprivation.

Affordable Warmth Strategy – working closely with other agencies, we published a strategy in 2011 which sets out how the affordable warmth partnership aims to tackle fuel poverty and assist Bury residents to achieve affordable warmth. The main focus is to improve the energy efficiency of homes, maximise household income, reduce energy consumption and, where possible, help reduce the cost of energy to the consumer. These are key elements when it comes to reducing economic and health inequalities within the Borough.

Trading Standards – work in partnership with the Office of Fair Trading to ensure fit and proper persons are licensed and competent to offer finance, particularly in the home collected credit market. They also monitor finance providers to ensure advertisements, agreements and financial information is compliant and truthful. There is also additional enforcement support by agreement from the 'Illegal Money Lending Team'.

Claiming What is Due

Ensuring our residents claim what they are entitled to and that they are aware of changes to their benefits following the Welfare Reform will be key to improving the quality of life for those residents who are benefit-dependent. The key areas of work include:

- Positive Take Up Campaign – Stigma and pride are key barriers for some of our residents, who may see benefits as 'taking charity' or those they do not want to be seen as 'scroungers.' Whilst existing services, for example the Council's Benefits Service, already undertake specific take-up campaigns, a joined-up approach across partners could widen the impact of this work.
- Make It Simple – the benefits system is notoriously confusing and will continue to create confusion with the impact of Welfare Reform. Whilst a one-stop shop may not be the answer, for everyone there is recognition that people should not have to find a way through a maze of agencies, forms and protocols. This could be done through a benefits practitioner forum to provide more simplified or joined-up approaches.

Projects

Customer Support and Collections – works with over 19,000 of the most vulnerable residents of the borough and is currently responsible for paying out more than £69 million per annum in Housing and Council Tax Support. Poverty has no place in thriving and sustainable communities, and so tackling benefit take-up through the promotion of benefits, and through providing assistance in claiming benefits where needed, are key objectives of the service. We endeavour to present a holistic customer focused approach to benefit take-up.

Local Housing Allowance Scheme – the aim is to help customers who have been disadvantaged by the changes in Local Housing Allowance since April 2011. The team spends time working through the different options: checking that all available benefit has been awarded through a detailed examination of the claimants past and current health needs, assisting in negotiations between tenants and landlords over levels of rent and providing advice and help on moving to alternative, affordable property.

Bury District Citizens Advice Bureau Social Policy – endeavours to tackle unfair policies and practices at source. The policy involves collecting evidence of issues, getting involved in campaign work via surveys, questionnaires and awareness-raising. This information may be used as evidence at Parliamentary briefings, be used in reports or be read by regulatory bodies such as Office of Communications (OFCOM) and the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM).

Bury Support Fund – localising support for resettlement and people facing crisis. Bury Council has a discretionary fund to help people in exceptional need and without the financial means to provide for themselves. This could be a short-term need because of a crisis or emergency that poses an immediate and substantial risk to their health and safety. Also the fund helps to support vulnerable people to stay in the community rather than entering care or those who need help to set up a permanent home when leaving temporary accommodation.

Under Occupancy and Benefit Cap – the Customer Support and Collections department helps people who find themselves worse off as a result of welfare reform changes. This work includes supporting customers through the changes, raising awareness and working in partnership to make sure customer’s have access to relevant advice and support where needed. This can take the form of money management / debt advice, support into work, or in limited cases help from the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme. Key outcomes will increase personal capacity, reduced risk to people falling into debt and supporting people into work.

Working together to tackle Food Poverty - As the impacts of the welfare reform continue to impact across the borough we have identified an increased demand for food amongst our most vulnerable people. Through the Bury Support Fund it has been established that within Bury there are a number of vulnerable families and individuals suffering food poverty. We have found that working together with Porch Boxes and other services improves the overall package of help we can offer to the most vulnerable and those in need.

Food parcels are fast becoming part of structural support system to help assist longer term solutions and we are closely monitoring the take up and increased demand for food parcels with the onset of Universal Credit.

Work Works

For those people who are able, taking up work is widely recognised as both the quickest route out of poverty and an effective safeguard against entering poverty. The key areas of work include:

- Work Experience and Volunteering Opportunities – offering people the opportunity to build their confidence and skills by volunteering is a recognised route to further training and work. Work experience provides the opportunity to develop skills, build confidence and gain a foothold in the world of work. Libraries offer support through work clubs and surgeries for job seekers.
- Barriers to Training – we know that people face a range of barriers to taking up training opportunities. Negative experiences in education, childcare difficulties and lack of confidence have been identified. Training providers in Bury already offer a range of 'first steps' courses, many in outreach locations, but there is a need to ensure that all the barriers to training are addressed.
- Raising Skill Levels – skills and qualifications are a passport to employment and better job prospects. Where a young person or adult is untrained and unqualified they are locked in poverty. We know that if people have the skills needed in the current labour market they have greater earning potential. We need to narrow the gap for those who are disadvantaged in our communities and raise their skills levels at level 2 and above so that local people have the chance to increase their economic well-being.
- Increasing Wage Levels – work needs to be higher paid if it is to provide a sustainable route out of poverty. The development of better-quality jobs in the borough will be key to ensuring residents have the opportunity to escape poverty.

Projects

Health and Wellbeing Board – Representatives from across the Bury community have come together to form the Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board to support and encourage partnership arrangements for health and social care services. The board will set the direction for the future design and delivery of local health care, social care and public health. The agenda includes the health and wellbeing of adults, children and families, as well as wider areas that impact on health such as housing, education and the environment.

Bury Employment and Skills Plan – To reduce inequalities in Bury by improving employment rates and the quality of employment available. The priorities are to improve intelligence by sharing and co-ordinating a range of labour market information held by partners, making it possible for all residents living in target areas or facing specific disadvantages and barriers to find work and engaging with local employers to encourage and support workforce development, diversify their workforces and address skills shortages.

Economic Development Strategy – The strategy sets out to create long-term, sustainable and competitive economic growth in the borough. Key themes that are crucial in achieving this are encouraging skills development to address Bury's and GM's economic needs and attracting and retaining talent. Team Bury partners will do this by working together in ensuring residents have access to high quality careers advice and guidance, increasing the volume of work experience opportunities, effective partnership working and working with employers to increase the diversity of their workforce.

Bury Volunteer Centre – Bury Third Sector Agency (B3SDA) aims to promote volunteering in Bury by helping people to get involved in local opportunities and by supporting organisations from all sectors that involve volunteers. We are a member of Volunteering England and have achieved Volunteer England Quality Accreditation for the work we do. We promote the benefits of volunteering; promote volunteering opportunities, on behalf of local organisations provide information about and signpost potential volunteers to local opportunities and support organisations that involve volunteers by providing advice, information and training on good practice when working with volunteers.

Bury Adult Learning Service – offers a range of learning opportunities designed to assist people to develop the underpinning skills that support entry into further training and employment. Courses in literacy, numeracy, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and IT qualifications are offered along with a range of courses offered specifically at learners with additional needs to support employability e.g. Enterprise Skills, Communication for Life and Work.

Bury Community Learning Partnership – brings together key providers of adult learning to develop a collaborative approach to support the planning and delivery of informal adult learning. It promotes personal development, family learning and learning which helps to strengthen communities. The work focuses funding on people who are disadvantaged and least likely to participate in learning, improves confidence and well-being, and develops key skills to support employability and supporting progression into higher level learning.

Sport and Physical Activity Service Pool of Volunteers – help with holiday activities, events and activities for young people. Volunteers can earn credits to go towards payment for essential and desirable qualifications to become a sports coach or assistant. Volunteers also get involved in larger events such as the Ramsbottom Festival and Bury Light Night.

Breaking the Cycle

People who are born into poverty all too often live in poverty throughout their lives. Raising aspirations and expectations is really important in helping people get out of poverty. Schools and colleges also have a vital role in ensuring our children and young people develop aspirations and expectations to be all they can be. The key areas of work include:

- Positive Work Experience Opportunities – Work experience can provide young people with a real understanding of the world of work, the social benefits, and sense of achievement and satisfaction that arises from earning the money in your pocket. All too often the experience can be mundane, unfulfilling and uninspiring. Good work experience is a spring board to permanent employment and can provide the motivation for a young person to continue to learn or train. We need to re-engage with schools to promote work experience and ensure that there is that progression into apprenticeships which will provide the skills needed to increase a young person's earning potential in the labour market.
- Relevant Role Models – These were identified as a good way to challenge the norms that exist within communities. Using photos and case studies in schools, sports and community centres can help to raise both aspirations and expectations of young people. Identifying volunteers from a range of backgrounds and careers who would be willing to talk to children and young people about their jobs would also help to raise awareness of career opportunities.
- Sporting activities – Data from national surveys indicate that children and young people living in deprived areas are less likely to participate in sport. We need to work with partners to overcome barriers to participation.

Projects

Backing Young Bury - The scheme provides opportunities for young people including extended work experience, pre-employment training and employment skills workshops. Almost a third of all Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) claimants are aged between 16 and 24. Backing Young Bury aims to improve the learning and working opportunities for young people whilst simultaneously ensuring that the council has a skilled future workforce.

Backing Young Bury has also recently worked with O2, the mobile phone and broadband provider, to offer 16/17 year old NEETs the opportunity to gain work experience through a two week intensive programme to gain generic skills. Once completed, they were guaranteed an interview to join the training Backing Young Bury training scheme. The interview-guarantee offer was also made available to 18-24 year olds who were out-of-work.

GM Commitment to Youth Employment – It is an Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) led and funded initiative to support the city region's young people into employment. This campaign will encourage businesses to support young people and take up national incentives / offers promoting national and local products at the same time as promoting our young people.

Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14 – focuses on a small number of priorities agreed by partners and are underpinned by a comprehensive assessment of the needs of children and young people in Bury. The 'improving lives of families with multiple needs' and 'ensuring all young people make a successful transition to adulthood' priorities are linked closely to this strategy.

Bury Circles of Influence – is an annual event involving young people from across Bury meeting with local decision-makers discussing issues such as bullying, prejudice and stigma; young people and the law; places to go; education; youth employment and work experience. Young people from the Bury Youth Cabinet organise the event and facilitate activities throughout the day.

Prestwich, Bury and Radcliffe Works – Bury Council along with partners such as Asian Development Association of Bury (ADAB) and Bury College provides personalised advice and guidance and matches unemployed people to suitable job opportunities. Together they help people who are not job ready to develop the skills and competence to become employable.

Bury College/Schools Mentoring Project – A programme of interactive workshops which will offer alternative learning environments and support positive attitudes towards education to raise aspirations and widen opportunities for disengaged 14-16 year olds. They will be mentored by Bury College students who have progressed from Level 2 to Level 3 programmes and can endorse that education has given them choices and potential to achieve success.

Bury College Apprenticeships – Supported and funded by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), apprenticeships at Bury College provide top quality work-based training programmes. These give apprentices the opportunity to earn a real wage as they learn and gain practical skills in the workplace.

Sportivate Programme – offers 14-25 year olds who are not participating regularly in sport the opportunity to take part in 6 to 8 weeks of high quality coaching sessions and supports them to continue playing sport afterwards.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy – Public Health and Early Years are working together on the cross-cutting priority 'Starting Well', ensuring a positive start to life for children, young people and families by supporting positive and resilient parenting, developing integrated services across education, health and social care focussing on the needs of children and creating positive opportunities for young people.

Strategic Issues

Keeping poverty issues high on the agenda was a key need, with strong governance required by Team Bury to ensure that the action plan for Reducing Inequalities is implemented, monitored and evaluated. The key areas of work include:

- Partnership Working Identified as a strength by almost every consultee, partnership working is working in Bury but it often relies on personalities or 'born networkers' rather than systematic methods and these arrangements are therefore at risk as and when the individuals move on. There needs to be more systematic working practices and procedures to ensure this risk is addressed.
- Policy Impacts There is a risk that key policies and decisions could be implemented without an understanding of how they could impact on the poorest people in the borough. The addition of 'poverty' to the current Equality Analyses could address this need.
- Valuing People Delivering services is hard, and delivering some of our services to people who do not want them, is even harder. Nevertheless the feedback from some consultees that as organisations we do not always successfully instil our values in all our staff has to be addressed.
- Supporting Communities, Improving Lives The Supporting Lives Programme builds on existing work both within Bury and across Greater Manchester to improve and reform public services, with the twin aims of reducing dependency/cost of public services and improving outcomes for those families who may be defined as troubled, complex or experiencing multiple problems.

Projects

Equality Strategy – The objectives of the strategy include improving educational achievement of vulnerable children, enabling greater autonomy for elderly people and people with disabilities, understanding and working to reduce levels of hate crime, anti-social behaviour and domestic violence and aiming for a workforce which reflects our diverse community.

Team Bury Equality Charter – is committed to the principles of equality, diversity and human rights. The charter strives to recognise people's different needs, situations and goals, and remove the barriers that limit what people can do or be. It ensures Team Bury services are accessible to, and meet the needs of all people.

Bury Local Plan Core Strategy – seeking an even spread of employment growth across the borough and addressing our regeneration areas fit well in this area.

Community Cohesion Plan – recognises the work we need to do with the voluntary, community and faith sectors across Bury to actively engage communities to build fair and more equal communities and create a sense of belonging.

Every Contact Counts

The paid and volunteer workforce of Team Bury is immense, with a wide reach and, for some of our workforce, access to residents who other services can not reach. We need to ensure that when our services are in contact with residents, that our front-line staff are confident and able to signpost people to other appropriate services. The key areas of work include:

- Team Bury Business Card - The development of a business card which has the contact details for a range of organisations that support people in poverty, for example Citizens Advice Bureau, Revenues and Benefits and Career Advice for adults. The card would be widely available and provided to front-line workers for distribution.
- One web-page or site – There are some good examples from other areas where the wide range of organisations have developed a joint web-page which provides information, advice and contact details for organisations that can help. Links from the websites of all partners would, again, maximise the benefit arising from a single contact with a single organisation via its website.
- Training Front-Line Workers - We want to train front-line workers and those entering residents' properties, so that they feel confident in recognising where residents may need advice and assistance because of poverty, and that they know which services can help.
- Life Events Interventions - We know the risk factors that can very often mean people moving into poverty, what we don't always do is address this risk when dealing with the immediate life event. When someone's partner dies, a relationship breaks down, or a young person is housed independently, do our services recognise the risk and refer people to other services appropriately?
- Children's Centres - Independent research demonstrates that Children's Centres are an effective way of supporting families to overcome the experience of living in poverty. We need to maximise and support the effectiveness of our network of Children's Centre to support as many families as possible.
- Township Forums - Township Forums have been created to promote engagement and partnership at the local level. There are six Township Forums across the borough and public meetings are held six times a year, usually in the evenings, in local community venues.

Projects

Bury Citizens Advice Bureau Social Policy Development Plan – includes training for staff and volunteers regarding the use of the website and Facebook to publicise events and awareness campaigns. Also to improve partnership working training has been made available via lottery funding with outside agencies to deal with the impact of the Welfare Reform changes.

Customer care training – is now available to staff as an e-learning or tutor-led course. The programme is available to front-line employees who are new to the council and for those who would like to develop the skills which contribute to exceptional customer service.

Communications Protocols and Toolkit – aims to cover all eventualities and recognising that we need to communicate in different ways depending on the audience. This document identifies that if an audience is hard to reach, we have to try harder. We have to make sure information is tailored to people's needs.

Website links to partnership organisations – to promote the work of our Team Bury partnership agencies, links will be made available to each partner's website on their web pages.

Performance Indicators

Performance Measure	Baseline (2012/13 year end result unless specified)	Target 2013/14	Target 2014/15	Target 2015/16
Percentage of take up of formal childcare by low-income working families	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Under 18 conception rate	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Number of households living in temporary accommodation	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Proportion of children living in poverty	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Proportion of population aged 19-64 for males and 19-59 for females qualified to at least Level 2 or higher	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Percentage of 19 year olds with qualifications at level 3	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage profile and the rest. (foundation stage)	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Achievement gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers achieving the expected level at Key Stage 2	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Achievement gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers achieving the expected level at Key Stage 4	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC

Inequality gap in the achievement of a Level 3 qualification by the age of 19	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Inequality gap in the achievement of a Level 2 qualification by the age of 19	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Percentage of 16-18 year olds by academic age who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
The % of Looked after children achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs (or equivalent)at key stage 4 (inc English & Maths)	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
The Special Educational Needs (SEN)/non SEN gap achieving 5 A* C GCSE inc. English and Maths	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Key Stage 4 attainment for Black and minority ethnic groups: Pakistani Heritage	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Key Stage 4 attainment for Black and minority ethnic groups: White Other	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Key Stage 4 attainment for Black and minority ethnic groups: Gypsy Roma	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Number of schools where fewer than 30% of pupils achieve 5 or more A* C grades at GCSE and equivalent including GCSEs in English and Maths	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Reduction in number of schools where fewer than 55% of pupils achieve level 4 or above in both English and Maths at KS2	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Overall employment rate for Bury	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC

Working age people on out of work benefits	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Working age people claiming out of work benefits in the worst performing neighbourhoods	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Adults with learning disabilities in employment	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Number of Level 1 qualifications in literacy (including ESOL) achieved	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Learners achieving an Entry Level 3 qualification in numeracy	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Working age people on out of work benefits	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Time taken to process Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit new claims and change events	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
In work tax and childcare credits	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Council tax benefit	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Housing benefit	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Pension tax credits Attendance Allowance	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Carers' Allowance	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC

Free school meals	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Disability Living Allowance	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Number of participants attending at least one sport & physical activity session from a top 20 % deprived area	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC

Glossary

To help you read this strategy, an explanation of the special words and phrases that you will find used in the strategy is set out below:

What does it mean?	
Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA)	A local government association representing the ten local authorities of Greater Manchester and includes other public, private and voluntary sectors. AGMA works together to drive new investment, co-ordinate planning and deliver results for its residents.
Bury Citizen's Advice Bureau	Provides a free and comprehensive advice service to Bury's residents. The service helps to resolve legal, money and other problems by providing confidential advice.
Bury Youth Cabinet	A group that supports young people to have a voice and to make positive changes for others. The group is supported by the United Kingdom Youth Parliament (UKYP) and allows young people to work alongside politicians at all levels to ensure that young people are well represented.
Employment Support Allowance	Replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on incapacity grounds in 2008. It offers personalised support and financial help to prepare for work.
Equality Analyses (EA)	Provides a comprehensive and consistent approach for analysing the effect upon equality and community cohesion of all our services, policies and practices.
HIGHLIGHT Review	An intensive six-week structured focus on a particular issue. It involves research and consultation and will provide an in-depth understanding of the issue.
Incapacity Benefit (IB)	See Employment Support Allowance.
Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)	The Index pulls together data on different forms of deprivation into one overall deprivation score. The main types of deprivation that are easily measured are: income (poverty), employment (or exclusion from the labour market), education, health, crime, access to services and housing.
Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)	A benefit paid to eligible people who are currently unemployed and looking for work.
Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)	The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 require PCTs and local authorities to produce a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) of the health and wellbeing of their local community.
Life Chances Indicator (LCI)	Performance indicators that emphasise personal and individual characteristics rather than social and environmental factors.

Office of Fair Trading (OFT)	The UK's consumer and competition authority. Their mission is to make markets work well for consumers by being open, fair and vigorous competition with each other for the consumer's custom.
Office for National Statistics (ONS)	Collects, compiles, analyse and disseminate a range of economic, social and demographic statistics relating to the UK.
Office of Communications (OFCOM)	The communications regulator that regulates the television and radio sectors, fixed line telecoms, mobiles, postal services, plus the airwaves over which wireless devices operate.
Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM)	Promotes competition, wherever appropriate, and regulates the monopoly companies which run the gas and electricity networks.
Super Output Area	SOAs are a unit of geography used in the UK for statistical analysis. SOAs were created with the intention that they would not be subject to frequent boundary change. The SOAs referred to typically have around 1,500 residents.
Team Bury (Local Strategic Partnership)	Team Bury is the name given to Bury's Local Strategic Partnership. The partnership consists of the major public agencies and representatives of other sectors of the community and works to deliver the ambitions for the borough – as set out in the <u>Community Strategy</u> .
Welfare Reform	The Welfare reform Act 2012 became law in March 2012. The Act introduces a wide range of reforms to the benefits and tax credits system.

Throughout this plan, you will find further details on what we have done and what we plan to do next. We hope you find this useful. If you have any comments or questions on how we could improve further, please email us at improvementteam@bury.gov.uk

Contact us

For further information about the Poverty Strategy please contact:

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 Email us at improvementteam@bury.gov.uk

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