

# SCRUTINY REPORT



**MEETING: Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**DATE: Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

**SUBJECT: Cost of living support and anti-poverty strategy**

**REPORT FROM: Councillor Richard Gold, Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities**

**CONTACT OFFICER: Lynne Ridsdale, Deputy Chief Executive (Corporate Core) / Chris Woodhouse, Strategic Partnerships Manager**

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## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 In March 2022 an update was provided to the Overview and Scrutiny committee on the significantly strengthened focus undertaken by the Council, on anti-poverty over the last 18 months.
- 1.2 The report detailed that a more proactive and targeted approach has been undertaken and that work would take place to harness this further through a refreshed anti-poverty strategy for the Borough. It was noted this strategy would be welcomed by the Committee for consideration.
- 1.3 Since that time cost of living pressures have continued to increase, and as such the approach to the strategy have evolved to consider the immediate operational response and support available to residents in the short term, alongside the medium term measures to increase resilience locally.
- 1.4 As such the draft *Cost of living support and anti poverty strategy* is presented to Overview and Scrutiny for consideration.

## **2.0 DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY**

- 2.1 The context of the strategy is one of increasing financial pressures on both the income and expenditure of local residents. There is a cost of living squeeze driven by high levels of inflation, with wages and benefits not matching price rises. This is particularly noticeable in relation to the increased costs of food and fuel (both energy bills and transportation) which have been driven by national and international factors.
- 2.2 Such pressures are not felt equally, with a disproportionate impact on particular households. This *Cost of living support and anti poverty strategy* recognises this by delivering on the vision and principles of the Borough's *Let's*

*Do It!* strategy; it outlines that in order to improve outcomes for individuals and families and reduce inequalities in the Borough that proactive, targeted, collaborative activity at place, with local communities is required.

- 2.3 To address this, the local response to the current cost of living crisis involves the collective targeting of national and local resource, using the insight of public service and community leads, to best identify households most requiring immediate support, whilst supporting residents to be increasingly aware of the broader range of advice and support that can be accessed to increase financial resilience.
- 2.4 The immediate cost of living support involves the hyper-local targeting of national government funding, including the extended Household Support Fund, alongside Council commitments - such as the £340k announced in the February 2022 budget to support with school uniform costs and support for households that are typically ineligible for wider hardship support.
- 2.5 This activity is already underway, led by the Council but in partnership with and shaped by local community networks. Activity to address the cost of living crisis continues to take place at pace, building on the previous report to Scrutiny and outlined in the appendix to the draft strategy. This strategy identifies the immediate steps being taken to support residents tackling socio-economic pressures, in addition to the planned activity to take place across each of the pillars identified below in a co-ordinated manner, to increasingly target activity and increase awareness of support.
- 2.6 Concurrent to this, the the *Let's Do It!* vision to tackle deprivation requires systemic change to put people at the heart of economic growth, and so alongside this immediate support are longer term actions. These create the conditions for future resilience but need immediate action to progress.
- 2.7 The strategy framework is built around a local adaptation of the pillars of poverty identified by Greater Manchester Poverty Action, having tested this approach through local public service leadership teams and community sector networks (including the Bury Older People's Network). These pillars are:
  - Tackling Food Poverty
  - Wellbeing and poverty
  - Finance and debt
  - Work and wages
  - Childhood poverty
  - Housing related poverty including fuel poverty
- 2.8 Underpinning these are enabling factors which support the delivery of activity across the pillars:
  - Challenging and addressing stigma and unconscious bias in relation to poverty
  - Digital inclusion
- 2.9 For each pillar, local data is detailed to highlight the specific characteristics of poverty being experienced in Bury. Through ongoing engagement across Council departments, Team Bury partners and community networks, local insight has been aligned with this data to shape collaborative local actions to improve outcomes and tackle deprivation.

- 2.10 A delivery plan against each theme is identified that will provide the focus of activity for the coming year. Given the rapidly changing nature of economic pressures and the immediacy of the requirement for action, even on long-term projects - the actions outlined cover the initial year of the plan to retain focus and allow flexibility to update to take account of changing conditions or opportunities (such as new support arrangements) which are often announced with relatively short notice.
- 2.11 The delivery plans will be reviewed on a quarterly basis and this will inform the planning for a 23/24 delivery plan; the review of the current plan will help determine whether the pillars remain the most appropriate means of tackling poverty and deprivation locally, in order to achieve the outcomes set out both in this strategy and the wider *Let's Do It!* outcomes framework.

### **3. GOVERNANCE**

- 3.1 This draft strategy is presented to the Overview and Scrutiny committee for comment, given discussion at the previous committee meeting. This is part of the co-design of the strategy ahead of the draft strategy being tabled at Cabinet Committee in July.
- 3.2 It is proposed that the Bury Health and Wellbeing Board assumes accountability for oversight of the activities set out in this strategy, in the context of its mission to reduce inequalities and improve quality of life throughout the Borough. Activity will be driven through a Partnership Delivery Group who will manage delivery against the plan and produce highlight reports, providing oversight to Team Bury; with Council assurance across Cabinet portfolios and reporting to this Scrutiny Committee.

### **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 Scrutiny is asked to:
- Note the significant progress that has been made in developing a proactive and targeted anti-poverty offer including the allocation of hardship support funding.
  - Comment on the draft *Cost of living support and anti-poverty strategy*
  - Include an item on delivery against within the 22/23 work programme towards the end of the calendar year.

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#### **List of Papers:-**

Cost of living support and anti-poverty strategy  
Equality Impact Assessment

#### **Contact Details:-**

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