



Classification	Decision Type:
Open	Non-key

Report to:	Cabinet	Date: 13 th July 2022
Subject:	Bury Cost of Living and Anti Poverty Strategy	
Report by:	Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities	

Summary

This report outlines the significantly strengthened focus undertaken by the Council on anti-poverty over the last 18 months, and to the proactive and targeted approach further through a refreshed anti-poverty strategy. Given the increasing cost-of-living pressures, the proposed strategy has been updated to consider the immediate operational response and support available to residents in the short term, alongside the medium term measures to increase resilience locally.

Recommendation

That the *Cost of living and anti poverty strategy* be approved, including the proposals in relation to the Household Support Fund.

Reasons for recommendation

The strategy sets out the Council and partnership activity to take place in immediate and short-medium term, to mitigate cost-of-living pressures in the Borough whilst striving towards delivering the outcomes set out in the *Let's Do It!* Strategy. This allows for a co-ordinated, targeted approach, capturing progress on deliverables and provides a framework through which to keep informed of the impact of pressures locally and through which to shape local responses to any future additional support measures made available.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The plan has been developed with local partners and networks to align existing and future activity and to build on existing strengths. The immediate activity in relation to cost of living pressures has been aligned to the longer-term anti-poverty approaches so that there is a holistic local approach that seeks to tackle the causes of poverty and inequality rather than just react to the symptoms of current pressures.

Background

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, whilst wages and benefits (compounded by the end to the £20 Universal Credit uplift) have not kept pace with price rises. This is particularly noticeable in relation to the increased costs of food and fuel, in terms of both energy bills and transportation, which have been driven by national and international factors.

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.

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.

Developing the plan

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.

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, outlined in appendix 2. This includes building on the Council Motion of March 2022 to strengthen our work with VCFSE groups to tackle food poverty through the Bury Food Partnership, which was further developed through a joint session at the June meeting of the Bury Community Support Network. 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.

Concurrent to this, 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. This directly delivers on the Council Motion from March to continue our efforts to alleviate all forms of poverty through tackling root causes and investing in our people and place.

The strategy framework is built around a local adaptation of the pillars of poverty identified by Greater Manchester Poverty Action, in light of the Council motion referenced above and 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

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

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. The strategy and delivery plan has been shaped through proactive dialogue across such platforms, including the Bury Community Support Network and Older People's Network.

In addition the draft strategy was tabled at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Bury Council in June 2022, at which a recommendation was made to "*make reference and incorporate the recently published Greater Manchester Poverty Action briefing on the current scale of the socio-economic duty in England and that Cabinet consider as part of its Anti-Poverty strategy adopting voluntarily the Socio Economic Duty (Duty is contained in Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010)*"

With regard to this recommendation, the strategy has been updated to reflect activity to further strengthen a focus on socio-economic vulnerability, building on work last year that set out such vulnerability as a local protected characteristic in the Council's revised Inclusion Strategy.

Implementation

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.

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.

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 Overview and Scrutiny Committee (including the performance sub-group to track outcome activity through corporate performance reporting).

Equality Impact and considerations:

Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.

Equality Analysis	<p>The Equality Analysis for the strategy is included with this report and has been updated following discussion at Overview and Scrutiny.</p> <p>The Equality Analysis outlines that this strategy increasingly focuses on targeting intervention across communities both geographically and of interest, adapting practices to be inclusive rather than adopting a 'one size fits all' approach.</p> <p>The Equality Analysis will be kept live during the delivery of the thematic plans.</p>
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Environmental Impact and Considerations:

The rising cost of fuel is a leading driver of household pressures. Increasing awareness and support in relation to energy efficiency measures and active travel options will result in environmental benefits as a positive by-product of this work. Alignment with work of the Bury Food Network will also seek to make a positive contribution to related activity in the Bury Climate Action Strategy.

Assessment of Risk:

The following risks apply to the decision:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Changing nature of economic pressures and new announcements of additional support	Strategy balances ambitions to improve on Let's Do It! outcomes whilst addressing immediate pressures, so delivery plan intentionally just for the immediate municipal year. Flexibility with thematic leads and through regular reporting to Portfolio and Health & Wellbeing Board to adjust approaches as required and provides framework to assess new pressures/ funding.

Awareness of support available	Utilisation of Public service leadership teams and wider practitioner networks in each neighbourhood; alongside engagement through Community Hub network; Bury VCFA led VCSE networks and central source of information via homepage on Council website.
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Consultation:

The development of the strategy, including immediate cost-of-living measures and broader thematic plans is the result on proactive, ongoing dialogue with networks across public services and community groups. This has included, but is not limited to, the Bury Community Support Fund; Public Service Leaders Network in neighbourhoods; Bury’s Older People Network; Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and VCSE Leadership Group.

Legal Implications:

This report was scrutinised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in advance of being considered by Cabinet. The Scrutiny Committee recommendations will be considered by Cabinet, Officers have updated this report in line with the Committee’s recommendation.

Financial Implications:

There are a number of budgets across various Council departments which support the work involved in the implementation of this strategy. Some are specifically mentioned within the report e.g. household support fund and the school uniform budget. However, there are further budgets and initiatives which will be distributed and delivered throughout the year as they become available.

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Appendices:

Draft Cost of living and anti-poverty strategy

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning
VCFA	Voluntary and Community Faith Alliance
VCFSE	Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector