



Classification	Decision Type:
Open	Non-key

Report to:	Cabinet	Date: 16 November 2022
Subject:	Bury Cost of Living and Anti-Poverty approach	
Report by:	Cabinet Member for Communities and Finance, Bury Council	

Summary

This report outlines the focused approach undertaken by the Council on anti-poverty and the proactive and targeted approach we are taking as part of the strategy. Given the increasing cost-of-living pressures, the paper outlines the ongoing challenge and impacts along with the approach being taken to deliver the local anti-poverty strategy.

Recommendation

That the Cabinet

- Notes the significant impacts of the increase in the Cost of Living (CoL) on local residents, and that the impacts are disproportionately affecting certain groups within the community.
- Endorse and approve the actions that have taken place, and that are planned as part of the anti-poverty strategy, including the proposals in relation to the use of the Household Support Fund.

Reasons for recommendation

The Paper sets out the wider context and the impact the cost of living is having on Bury residents. Local data and insight has been used to inform the local approach and shape the proposals related to the Household Support Fund (HSF). This local insight has helped to inform our approach to responding to this issue effectively and efficiently, ensuring we utilise resources in a way which has a maximum impact on our residents, and a focus on reducing inequalities.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The approach has been evidence based and developed with local partners and networks to align existing and future activity and to build on existing strengths. The approach both aligns to our local strategy and action plan and the wider work across Greater Manchester. A series of long, medium- and short-term actions are identified within the plan which we are delivering on and we continue to engage with partners, communities and people with lived experience to ensure the approach is right and supporting those most in need.

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, with wages and benefits not keeping pace with matching price rises. The levels of inflation have continued to rise since the development of the strategy in June and as such the impacts are increasing. The Institute for Health Equity (Aug 2022) estimate 55% of UK households will fall into fuel poverty by January 2023 without additional interventions. Households with children as well as those on low incomes, living with disabilities and Black and Minority Ethnic groups are most at risk.

Poverty has a very damaging impact on both physical and mental health for example through malnutrition, cold & damp homes, social isolation, homelessness and severe stress & anxiety. There is therefore likely to be much higher demand for all aspects of health and social care including informal carers, community and voluntary sector provision, primary care, social care, mental health services, urgent care, hospital admissions, length of stay, delayed discharges as more people become more susceptible to respiratory infections (including Covid-19 & flu). In addition, those with long term conditions such as cardio-vascular disease are more likely to experience exacerbations/ greater acuity or people turning to self-medication through drugs and alcohol to cope with their distress. There is likely to be an increase in premature mortality and a further widening of inequalities

There is also growing concern for people being cared for at home using specialist equipment as there will be an increased cost for the energy. Where this is not funded by the NHS, the cost will fall upon individuals and families. This affects adults and children with long-term conditions and disabilities such as those respiratory patients dependent on home mechanical ventilation. The consequence is that people will have to make other drastic & damaging measures to manage their fuel bills and/ or be unable to utilise their equipment. There are already anecdotal stories emerging across the country of this happening. In Bury we currently have 590 residents who rely upon electrical medical devices, many of whom are already struggling with electricity bills.

The feedback being collated is confirming a number of these concerns. The recent GM residents survey suggests 4 in 5 GM residents are worried about cost of living with around 2 in 5 'very worried'. Of those that were worried there was a disproportionately high proportion of parents with young children, disabled respondents and those aged 25-34. In September 35% of GM households reported having to borrow money or use credit – this is substantially higher than the national average of 22%.

The survey also suggests 56% of GM residents are having difficulty affording energy costs. However, this is even higher in certain groups with 67% of those with disabilities, 78% with mental health issues and 75% of residents with a first language other than English, struggling with energy costs. The GM survey also confirmed the impact the CoL was having on wellbeing with 44% of respondents reporting high levels of anxiety (compared to 36% nationally).

There has also been a 'GM big disability survey' which ran from June to August 2022. The findings highlighted the disproportionate impact the CoL crisis is having on those

with disabilities. 68% of respondents confirmed they have already changed the food they eat to save money, a third cannot pay their bills. In addition, 39% were in debt, 75% said they spend more on gas or electric because they are disabled and 23% were now not using digital services due to a lack of money. Respondents outlined similar challenges around their social care support, housing, accessibility, wellbeing, physical and mental health.

To address this, Bury's 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. With a second aim being to support residents to be increasingly aware of the broader range of advice and support that can be accessed to increase financial resilience.

The Approach to date

In June in collaboration with key partners the anti-poverty strategy and action plan was developed based on the LET'S principles. Following the sign off of a strategy an anti-poverty steering group made up of all key partners was formed and theme leads were agreed for the 6 key areas of the strategy.

- Tackling Food Poverty
- Wellbeing and poverty
- Finance and debt
- Work and wages
- Childhood poverty
- Housing related poverty including fuel poverty

Positive progress has been made against the strategy in each of the areas, examples of these include;-

Tackling food poverty

- A more sustainable food pantry model has been established across a number of previous food banks – providing greater dignity and choice for residents
- Promotion of the Healthy start vouchers has been done throughout the Bury system encouraging the uptake from parents in need
- A local drive to build confidence and increase uptake of FSM through the school catering service has taken place
- Healthy eating for less cooking demos celebrating local affordable food have been carried out in collaboration with Bury Markets

Wellbeing and Poverty

- The Beacon service social prescribers have been reviewing caseloads to understand poverty related causes of referrals and develop neighbourhood based pathways of support

- The 'ask for Jesse' campaign a project between Boots and the hygiene bank to offer free hygiene products for those that cannot afford them has been actively promoted
- A number of fuel poverty roadshows have been delivered in local venues for both partners and the public to assist in identifying what support and provision is available and how to access the support
- An older people calendar has been created and distributed through covid vaccination clinics and other partners outlining financial support available for older people

Finance and Debt

- A Bury Money Advice Referral Tool (MART), has been developed (to be launched in November) in collaboration with GM poverty Action and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). This is a simple tool to help frontline staff understand the cause of the financial issues and assist in signposting to the most appropriate local support
- A Pilot project to provide additional targeted neighbourhood based support through face-to-face access to Citizens Advice members of staff. This will be a mix of being in set locations at particular times but also attendance at community groups and delivery of bespoke sessions, targeted to communities most highlighted as socio-economically vulnerable through the anti-poverty strategy. The pilot is being funded by the Council as a means to test the effectiveness of such an approach without destabilising current capacity based at the Town Hall

Work and Wages

- Awareness raising activities have taken place to promote advice and support available for self-employed individuals including an e-newsletter
- A have a go session to promote work in construction and digital was organised in Radcliffe with over 250 people in attendance
- The Business and investment team partnered with working well to deliver a fuel poverty event
- The economic strategy refresh is underway with a neighbourhood level focus

Childhood poverty

- Healthy Start vouchers have been promoted through all networks via an extensive comms plan to increase uptake
- A school uniform scheme to provide vouchers for £30 for primary children and £50 for secondary age was rolled out for 6000 children in advance of the summer term
- As part the circles of influence event the voice of the child was heard about the impact of poverty on young people and more specific sessions are planned to focus solely on the impact of the CoL and poverty
- Anti-poverty principles are being embedded at the heart of the development of the family hub pilot

Housing related poverty including fuel poverty

- Green Home grants have been promoted to local tenants and landlords to properties that are rated E, F and G in targeted areas
- Bury is actively making referrals to Your homes Better/Retrofit Accelerator scheme and information placed on council website
- Enforcement of energy efficiency regulations is ongoing with over 50 privately rented properties that have already been improved from at least an E rating with 27% achieving a C rating

Underpinning these are several enabling factors are ongoing which support the delivery of activity across the pillars, including:

- Challenging and addressing stigma and unconscious bias in relation to poverty
- Digital inclusion

Implementation

To support the strategy delivery in all the key theme areas is the roll out of the Household Support Fund (HSF) – which is taking place between now and March 2023. The plans for the distribution of the HSF to ensure the targeted approach of this resource are outlined below

Households	Indicative allocation
Direct provision of vouchers to cover the school holiday periods for those households eligible for FSM	£650k
Direct provision of vouchers to those of working age on CTS and ESA (Income related) but not on UC	£245k
Direct provision of vouchers to support energy costs of those known the OCO of having living equipment which requires electricity	£232k
Direct provision of vouchers to support energy costs for care leavers up to the age of 25	£20k
Proactive targeting of socio-economic households through trusted referrers including Public Service Leadership Team colleagues; Staying Well Team; Live Well Service; Pastoral Teams; Community Leads	£270k

Additional capacity to Contact Centre and Welfare Support Service to administer scheme in timely including provision of dedicated phone line for support.	£67k
Provision of resilience support to community support groups (including foodbanks) for targeted provision within their locality	£50k

The enclosed proposals align with the national guidance and conditions as well and reflect the local needs and demands. In addition, this builds on delivery of support so far which included supporting 14,400 through targeting Household Support funding via network of public service places based colleagues. This was delivered through a range of means including Early Help; school pastoral teams; Older People Staying Well Team; Community Hubs; Job Centre Plus accommodation team; Six Town Housing; Fire & Rescue service – community leads including foodbanks, Age UK, Eagles Wing and Citizens Advice. It is also in addition to the funding of over £175k, which has been provided to foodbanks over the last 3 years in terms of Covid support and resilience funding

In summary Bury have and are delivering a system response to the CoL crisis which considers the 6 key areas identified in the anti-poverty strategy. In addition, we have a delivery plan which is flexible enough to allow us to systematically engage with communities to continue to shape our local response as required.

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 available on request 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.

Consultation:

Since the development of the strategy a CoL summit was held to review the approach and to identify any further areas which need to be considered and included. In addition a second CoL event is being organised to establish what more communities can do, what communities need to be supported further with and what statutory services need to provide – attendance will include all key partners including those in the voluntary and community sector.

Legal Implications:

There are no specific legal issues arising from this report. All decision making underpinning the use of funds including HSF will be carried out in accordance with the Council Constitution.

Financial Implications:

The anti poverty strategy is supported through a number of core budgets, such as the local council tax support scheme and grants such as the Household Support Grant which is received in year

Bury Council’s Household Support Fund allocation is £1.534m for the period October 2022 to March 2023, the deployment of the funding is set out in this report. This is the second tranche of funding received this financial year

The Household Support Fund has supplemented Council resources approved as part of the 2022/23 budget and referenced within this report.

As part of the Corporate Core monthly budget monitoring process the expenditure linked to the schemes described in this report will be tracked to ensure all expenditure aligns to the costs set out in this report.

Reporting Requirements

Bury Council is required to make two Statements of Grant Usage and Management Information returns to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

The deadline for completing the statements is shown in the table below. Failure to return the MI by the deadline may result in a delayed payment or a payment being refused.

Management Information Return	Reporting period: from	Reporting period: To	Deadline
Interim MI return	01-Oct-22	31-Dec-22	25-Jan-23
Final MI return	01-Oct-22	31-Mar-23	28-Apr-23

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Background papers:

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