

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: Tuesday 9th January 2024

SUBJECT: Anti Poverty Strategy update

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

**CONTACT OFFICER: Jon Hobday, Director of Public Health/
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Woodhouse, Strategic Partnerships Manager**

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Over the past eighteen months activity has been taking place to deliver Bury's Cost of Living and Anti Poverty Strategy. Whilst approved in July 2022, this built upon and significantly strengthened the focus undertaken by the Council on the preceding 18 months of proactive targeted approaches to support our residents.
- 1.2 Through a multi-agency partnership of Council colleagues working alongside partners across the Team Bury system, focus has been on delivery against the pillars of poverty identified in the strategy and maximising opportunities to identify, target support and build resilience in our communities.
- 1.3 This paper is the latest update on the delivery of activities against the strategy and priorities with this, which collectively support the wider delivery of Bury's *LET'S Do It!* ambitions.
- 1.4 It should be noted that this work has taken place in continually challenging conditions. Over the last 12 months there have been a range of factors in the wider economy which have resulted in further increases in cost-of-living pressures for local people in Bury. These factors continue to push more local people into poverty and reduce residents ability to meet their basic needs.
 - Interest rates have continued to rise further, from 3.5% in January 2023 to 5.25% in December 2023.
 - Inflation levels have remained stubbornly high with levels as high as 10.1% in January 2023 slowly declining to 4.6% in October 2023 (still significantly higher than the turn of the decade).
 - Fuel prices have also continued to increase, starting 2023 at £1.50 per litre with most recent costs being £1.55 per litre in October 2023.

- There is an expectation that the price energy cap will increase in January 2024 to £1,928 from £1,834.

2. DELIVERY OF THE PLAN

- 2.1 Bury Anti Poverty Steering Group meets monthly and is chaired by Bury's Director of Public Health, recognising the impact of poverty as a wider determinant of health. As such the work has been overseen by the Bury's Health and Wellbeing Board given a focus to tackle the root causes as the Borough's standing commissioning on reducing inequalities. The Steering Group includes the Chairs of the Bury Community Support Network; Citizens Advice Bury & Bolton; representation from Bury Voluntary & Community Faith Alliance; and public service colleagues from across public health, children's services, welfare support and communications. Priority leads are identified from across this partnership to drive forward the workplan.
- 2.2 The priorities within the strategy have been built around a local interpretation of the pillars of poverty identified by Greater Manchester Poverty Action, shaped through engagement with community sector networks and partners. 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 a series of enablers including challenging stigma and bias in relation to poverty, digital inclusion, and engagement.

- 2.3 The group oversee a detailed action plan to oversee delivery of activity. The plan is kept live to respond to new risks (such as worsening macro-economic factors or newly identified vulnerabilities) and new opportunities (such as funding or identified best practice).
- 2.4 This has been supported by a series of Cost of Living and Anti Poverty summits held by the Council, bringing community leads together to share insight on how poverty is specifically being experienced in the Borough and to co-develop interventions and communications approaches. This has included one in May 2023 which shaped Bury's submission for the 2023/24 Household Support Fund (see section 10 below)
- 2.5 Bury's approach to tackling the impact and causes of poverty has our LETS principles at its heart – targeting provision to those communities that have experienced the greatest inequality; working collaboratively to identify and coordinate support to households; building on our strengths in local communities and linking people to these. The tailoring and targeting of support has been focused on communities of place – notably the lower super output areas referenced within Bury's Anti Poverty Strategy – communities of identity, including those who haven't traditionally connected into support, and communities of experience, e.g. those leaving care.

PILLAR ONE: TACKLING FOOD POVERTY

- 3.1 Food and poverty are intricately linked, forming a complex relationship that impacts many residents. Poverty, characterised by a lack of financial resources, often leads to food insecurity, making it difficult for individuals and families to access an adequate and nutritious diet. Conversely, inadequate nutrition can perpetuate the cycle of poverty by affecting health, cognitive development, and overall productivity.
- 3.2 Work has continued with the Bury Community Support Network (BCSN) – a collection of foodbanks, food pantries and food clubs in the Borough (along with the voluntary and community faith alliance to work with those not part of the network). This has included group development support through the VCFA, both as a collective but also with members looking to develop sustainable models, including visiting a model of delivery in Liverpool and a workshop on Sustain principles.
- 3.3 Early this year, as part of sustained push to increase the uptake and use of Healthy Start vouchers, steps were taken to allow Healthy Start cards to be used on Bury Market to provide families with nutritious and affordable food. The NHS Healthy Start scheme is for eligible people who are pregnant or have children under the age of 4, offering help towards milk, fruit, vegetables, pulses and formula. Healthy Start cards are worth £442 per year to the average family in Greater Manchester. Healthy Start at Bury Market is administered locally by Bury Food Partnership, following a successful funding application to Sustainable Food Places, building on the Bury Food Partnership's bronze award as a Sustainable Food Place.
- 3.4 Healthy Start awareness and training has been provided by Bury Council's Children's Services Early Help Team, including to community childcare settings, Six Town Housing and with DWP.
- 3.5 Young people in the Borough eligible for Free School Meals have had holiday food provision extended, benefiting over 6,900 individuals. This has now continued since the Covid-19 pandemic and is currently up-to-and-including the Easter 2024 holiday. Over the school summer holiday this was complimented by Holiday Activities and Food programme which also takes place over the Christmas 2023 holiday period. Over the summer 1,636 young people accessed a total of 41 different types of provision which were offered from 28 providers.
- 3.6 For Eid-ul-Adha there was promotion of the 'Share My Qurbani' initiative locally, including through local mosques and community groups, to provide support to those struggling financially to partake in celebrations of a major faith date.
- 3.7 Cost of Living community grants have supported voluntary and community groups in the Borough to deliver targeted interventions to support with addressing food related concerns. Examples from recent months include the
 - Friends of Clarence Park partnered with a social enterprise, Cracking Good Food, to hold a Kitchen Kit Giveaway and cooking activity fun day. Residents and community groups were able to come along and pick up pre-loved kitchen equipment to enable them to cook their favourite meals at home. They also took part in cooking demonstrations for healthy meals on a

budget, shared a delicious meal, along with information about Healthy Start cards from the council's Public Health team. Friends of Clarence Park have also made a fantastic community recipe book.

- Phoenix Centre in Prestwich delivering structure sessions on cooking healthy meals on a budget particularly for teenagers and young adults. This builds on sessions Bury Adult Learning Centre have supported with Radcliffe Food Club.
- The Friendship Circle has collaborated with Jewish Action for Mental Health demonstrating cookery skills (as a conduit to broader support)

3.8 Residents' struggling with urgent and priority costs such as food, fuel, rent and resettlement costs for those fleeing domestic violence have been provided with immediate support through the Council's Welfare Support offer, with direct financial assistance dispersed through Household Support Fund, Bury Support Fund, Council Tax Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments.

PILLAR TWO: WELLBEING AND POVERTY

- 4.1 Wellbeing and poverty are interconnected concepts that reflect the overall quality of life for individuals and communities. Poverty can have a significant impact on wellbeing, as it often restricts access to fundamental resources and opportunities. Wellbeing improvements, on the other hand, can contribute to poverty reduction by enhancing education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Policies and interventions aimed at improving wellbeing contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering sustainable development.
- 4.2 Social Prescribing link workers from the Beacon Service continue to work across the neighbourhoods, monitoring specific cost of living pressures on health and wellbeing and signposting residents when required.
- 4.3 As part of this a self-care strategy is being developed for professionals alongside a toolkit which will offer a consistent message and pathway of services that can support residents, including prevention opportunities. This includes information on the Getting Help Helpline to support emotional mental wellbeing and non-clinical support available to residents in the Borough.
- 4.4 Winter wellbeing guidance has been prepared and disseminated in partnership with the Anti Poverty Steering Group. Weekly events have been provided to raise awareness and offer advice, winter well packs have also been provided to those most vulnerable this winter to help residents keep warm and offer information of where to get help. 400 of these packs have been distributed via food banks/pantries, Live Well Service, Bury Library services and via the Staying Well team.
- 4.5 Cost of Living community grants are facilitating neighbourhood-based support, such as through Trust House who have added wellbeing sessions to their programme of support linked to their food pantry, which has included tailored support to an individual's wellbeing, exercise sessions and mindfulness.

PILLAR THREE: FINANCE AND DEBT

- 5.1 Finance and poverty are interconnected aspects of economic development, and understanding their relationship is crucial for addressing challenges related to income inequality and social wellbeing.
- 5.2 Information to support with debt advice has been strengthened, both in terms of the tools to help practitioners lead conversations with residents (and for residents to be able to self-guide through this) and the availability of face-to-face contact points within the Borough.
- 5.3 The Money Advice Referral Tool, developed in conjunction with Greater Manchester Poverty Action, provides a handy online or paper based tool to signpost people to monetary advice and support based on specific circumstances. This has evolved through discussions with local groups, with Citizens Advice, and tested with Community Support Network. The tool is available through The Bury Directory and has been shared with front-line staff.
- 5.4 Citizens Advice Bury & Bolton (CABB) took up a temporary presence in Bury Town Hall following their previous base being no longer available. In recent months they have now moved into Castle Buildings and their face-to-face drop in has resumed there. To compliment this has been a neighbourhood engagement post who acts as a CABB triage worker in community settings which have included Veterans Breakfast Club; Tenants and Residents Associations; Foodbanks including Trinity Foodbank and Brandlesholme Community Centre; Red Door Caritas drop-in. Bury Council has worked with CABB to target this engagement to settings within or close to the Lower Super Output Areas recognised in the strategy where communities are most acutely impacted by poverty. This role allows for people to have a face-to-face discussion, in some cases provided with immediate support, in more complex cases supported to book in for a more in-depth appointment.
- 5.5 Bury Council has continued to invest in a CABB presence in the Borough. During quarter 2 of 2023/24 CABB had direct contact with 635 local residents, with each client on average having 4 issues per enquiry, including debt assessment, council tax arrears, fuel debts and personal independent payments. The income gain from Bury clients accessing CABB provision relating to the quarter is £773k. Whilst some increases are temporary, the majority of this is sustainable income increases. Of the 635 Bury clients engaged with during Q2, 11% categorised themselves as having a disability. 42% self-reported as having a long-term health condition, with CABB increasing links with the GP Federation to increase the identification of support across primary care.
- 5.6 There has been promotion of money advice guidance, both from the perspective of increasing income, such as Pension Credit awareness (including work with the Bury Older People's Network on support to overcome stigma associated with benefits) and to protect people's income, such as through loan shark awareness delivered by Six Town Housing and shared through a social media campaign.
- 5.7 It is recognised that community groups themselves have faced increased financial pressures in recent years and 36 voluntary groups applications supported through Cost-of-Living resilience payments with a value of over £80k.

- 5.8 To enable the Council to meet the challenges both we and our residents face, a new Supportive Collection Pathway has been created for Council Tax – based on the tenets Let’s Engage, Let’s Enable, Let’s Support. This has aligned the Welfare and Collection/Recovery teams within Revenues and Benefits to provide a joined-up and holistic approach to collection and welfare, embedding a pro-active and preventative approach to collection as the cornerstone of the Revenues service.
- 5.9 To provide additional support at the hardest time of year for many families, there are now repeat payments in place for Food and Fuel, whereby eligible residents will receive 3 x £300 monthly payments over the winter period. Software (Ascendant) purchased as part of this year’s HSF allocation, is being utilised to identify and target residents who are either in acute need of support or indicating that they are beginning to struggle, thus enabling support to be directed to them through HSF and the wider Bury Welfare offer.
- 5.10 The financial value of these monthly payments is larger than previously, based on strong feedback, particularly from community partners, confirmed at the Cost of Living summit held on May 2023.
- 5.11 Data sets identifying residents struggling to maintain their Council Tax payments for the first time have been pushed through the Ascendant product, who’s software provides results demonstrating whether a resident is in hardship. This has resulted in 462 residents being contacted to advise them of the award – and potentially £415,800 in support being allocated via this method over the winter period.
- 5.12 This work will be sustained over the remainder of the year to ensure that maximisation of support is safeguarded as well as being allied with a preventative approach towards helping struggling residents. At the end of Quarter 3 a review of allocated funds will be carried out to confirm spend to date and identify any areas of slow allocation. Any remaining funds will then be allocated using existing data sources and Ascendant in a targeted approach, with households in the 10% most deprived Medium Super Output Areas (MSOAs) amongst prioritised recipients.

PILLAR FOUR: WORK AND WAGES

- 6.1 The *LET’S Do It!* strategy sets out the vision to reduce inequality through inclusive growth and Bury’s Anti Poverty Strategy recognises that sustainability and resilience in income is driven by good quality work that pays well.
- 6.2 This pillar recognises that cost of living pressures apply to those not in work (where benefits have not kept pace with inflation) and those in work (where wages have similarly not increased at a significant rate). Therefore, the focus is not just on getting people into work but to be able to progress in careers and for work to be financially rewarding.
- 6.3 This is underpinned by the development of a new economic strategy for Bury which will support the Council’s approach to reducing economic inactivity, inequality and poverty, over the next decade and beyond, to ensure that we

can deliver our ambitions for sustainable and inclusive growth. In particular, the draft Economic Strategy sets out a series of Ambitions, including the *People Ambition: To build the capabilities of people to find, sustain and progress in employment and achieve economic security*. So, alongside masterplanning work for town centres in the Borough and the development of proposals for the Atom Valley which will bring significant employment opportunities to the Borough is ensuring that local individuals have the aspiration, confidence, skills and experience to connect into these opportunities as they arise.

- 6.4 Building on Bury Council's Living Wage commitment, set out in the Anti Poverty Strategy, the Council ran a session in November 2023 to promote similar commitments from partners in the Borough. The Council teamed up with the Real Living Wage Foundation, Good Employment Charter and Unison for a business breakfast to make the Real Living Wage week.
- 6.5 A Radcliffe Works Lift Off event took place in October 2023 at Radcliffe Football Club. The session showcased local skills opportunities and live vacancies. This principle is being followed up to develop further hyper-local employment and skills events, tailored to local communities. Job Centre Plus job fairs at the Elizabethan Suite have included wrap around and skills support to the events, to support upskilling as well as work opportunities directly.
- 6.6 This links to the sentiment of breaking the cycle of poverty requiring a comprehensive approach that recognizes the symbiotic relationship between education, skills and economic wellbeing. Work is taking place with primary schools to inspire young people on career opportunities and pathways into employment, including into further learning through Bury Adult Learning. The Adult Learning team have been working to engage groups typically less-represented within their learning cohort and increasingly engaging within the communities where people live, 'going to' communities rather than everyone having to attend the Learning Centre in Bury Town Centre. Further promotion has taken place of WEA (Adult Learning Within Reach) grants to help disadvantaged, excluded unemployed and economically inactive people to take the next steps towards further education.
- 6.7 Community cost of living funding is supporting tailored support in such upskilling/ reskilling, such as new technical and digital skills through Safetynet in Prestwich, whilst a further example of other activity to support people into employment includes work with Bury Hospice to deliver an element of *Working Wardrobe* for those individuals attending interviews or who need a capsule working wardrobe.
- 6.8 On 8th January 2024 the 'Bury Works' neighbourhood hub commences in the Millgate. Hosted by Ingeus, the Working Well Work & Health programme delivery partner in Bury, this will provide a shared workspace for partners who support residents with wrap around support including Citizens Advice, Bury Adult Learning, National Careers Service, local and regional mental wellbeing and healthy lifestyle support, in addition to local and regional skills provision.

PILLAR FIVE: CHILDHOOD POVERTY

- 7.1 Childhood poverty can have a profound impact on education and can create significant barriers to academic success. Limited access to resources, Nutritional challenges, health issues, stress and mental health, limited educational opportunities are some ways in which childhood poverty can affect education.

- 7.2 In October the East Family Hub opened as the pilot Family Hub in the Borough, with anti poverty principles embedded as part of the neighbourhood priorities and offer to families. This includes the ongoing promotion of Healthy Start where the uptake rate in Bury has increased from 62% in January 2023 to 73% in November 2023.
- 7.3 Bury based staff from the Department for Work and Pensions have embedded Healthy Start into the questions that are asked when carrying out universal credit initial claimant meetings. This is a potentially groundbreaking step forward and is being implemented across all the job centres in Bury to ensure consistency and being promoted to Great Manchester DWP partners. The Bury Registry Office has agreed to promote Healthy Start to families when they register births (with printed promotional materials in their office to give out, and as an electronic attachment to their forms and on their electronic screens). In addition, the School Meals Service have agreed to add Healthy Start info onto their printed menus.
- 7.4 Cost of living community grants have included projects focusing on access to activities and support for families, such as Twinkleboost that provide warm and nurturing spaces and outreach provision to break the cycle of poverty by working to close the current vocabulary gap that exists on school entry.
- 7.5 The Children's Strategic Partnership Board have continued to promote targeted anti-poverty activities for families and young people, including through their weekly partnership newsletter. This has detailed free online inclusive family financial education workshops on how to help children with neurodiversity and additional learning and support needs learn about money; promotion of initiatives where young people can eat from free/for £1; local and regional free digital skills sessions for families and broader support messages through Children's Partnership Lunchtime learn sessions.

PILLAR SIX: HOUSING RELATED POVERTY INCLUDING FUEL POVERTY

- 8.1 The relationship between housing and poverty is complex, with affordability, stability, and neighbourhood quality playing significant roles. Addressing housing issues is a key component of broader efforts to reduce poverty and promote social and economic equity.
- 8.2 The Citizens Advice Bury & Bolton Energy redress project has been providing energy information, guidance and support in conjunction with Age UK. The project is designed to build household resilience and confidence in managing energy concerns, with tailored advice as part of a holistic approach where other areas of spend reduction or income maximisation can be explored. The project includes:
- Changing suppliers where there is a possibility of better tariffs
 - Information and advice on making your homes more energy efficient
 - Tips for budgeting and explore options to obtain additional funding, such as Warm Home Discount

- Vulnerable (for example, low incomes, elderly, single parents and those living with disabilities) clients may be entered onto a Priority Register with their energy supplier which may see them eligible for free gas checks, priority repairs and other benefits.
 - Provision of advice on Smart Meters and the benefits that they can bring.
- 8.3 Six Town Housing have had an Energy efficiency offer in place for their tenants. This includes risk assessments in place and long-term support being completed with tenants who have no access to utilities, with broader energy advice targeted and promoted through community days including in Chesham, Topping Fold, Besses, Radcliffe and Rainsough. Work for wave 2 on Chesham properties having solar panels windows and doors to improve energy performance in ongoing and will be completed by April 2025.

ENABLERS

- 9.1 Digital wellbeing and poverty are interconnected in various ways, influencing individuals and communities' access to resources, opportunities, and overall quality of life. Empowering individuals with the skills and tools to navigate the digital landscape can enhance educational opportunities, facilitate remote work, and improve access to healthcare and other essential services.
- 9.2 Six Town Housing have expanded the Digital Eagles project and the digital offer to their tenants to ensure they are able to access services and support. Free sims and data have been provided when required and exploring free WiFi within sheltered provision has been completed.
- 9.3 Six Town Housing have produced an online poverty campaign including promotion of how to save money. This includes quick tips to save energy and how to access financial support service produced and information on standing charges. There have also been campaigns to promote downsizing/mutual exchanges to support tenants to move to smaller/more suitably sized accommodation.
- 9.4 Digital wellbeing courses have been delivered by libraries, Age UK and Bury Circle. Meanwhile, Healthwatch are continuing with drop-in sessions for supporting asylum seekers, refugees and people who don't have English as a first language. They have also been working on prescriptions, looking at difficulties and issues people have with them.
- 9.5 There have been many communications provided to staff and residents, raising awareness of where and how they can access financial support on the current cost of living. Also, many specific cost of living events have been delivered to raise awareness of what support is available, how you can reduce costs on energy and food. Targeted sessions have been curated, tailored to specific communities, both of place and identity, where there are specific pressures or barriers to access. This has included a session with Jewel tailored for the Charedi community in Sedgley in September 2023. More recently a Cost of Living Showcase with ADAB took place in December 2023 in which 150 people attended and received support including through the Household Support Fund and energy advice. Tailored sessions are also planned for Radcliffe, Besses and

Rainsough early in the new year, as targeted areas in line with the Anti Poverty Strategy.

- 9.6 Press releases, photos, specific campaigns and flyers have been produced and disseminated each quarter. This has included showcasing initiatives funded through Cost of Living Community grants; means of accessing support through the collated information on www.bury.gov.uk/hardshiphelp , tailored local information on the Bury Directory and provision of a Cost of Living helpline, separate from the main Council switchboard number to access support. This blend of approaches has been supplemented by information and guidance to front line practitioners across the Team Bury system. This ensures staff are well equipped to identify households who could benefit from additional support and effectively signpost/support such individuals and families into income maximisation/ expenditure reduction approaches.
- 9.7 Opportunities continue to be sought to weave and embed anti-poverty messaging into broader events in neighbourhoods where the experience of poverty is particularly acute. This includes links to pop-up vaccination clinics in neighbourhoods; as part of joint work with Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service on fire safety; links to bowel cancer screening uptake in East Bury; and Anti Poverty information provided at weekly sessions run by Live Well Team throughout December as part of the winter well programme

RESOURCES

- 10.1 Support funds can include financial assistance, food aid, housing support, and other resources to help households meet their basic needs. Below are some key successes that have happened.

- Proposals have been agreed and vulnerable individuals and families have been identified and supported through trusted referrer pathways.
- Strong engagement with Revenues and Benefits colleagues and demonstrable impact of their support
- Significant roll out of Household Support Fund (HSF) plans alongside core Welfare Support supportive measures:

Support Measure	Reach	Value
Free School Meals	13,500	£734k / £1.5m inc. committed
Food and Fuel	2,676	£394k / £616k inc. repeat awards
COL Community Grants	c3,500	£49,000
CTAX Support Fund	480	£48,000
Bury Support Fund (Resettlement Fund)	155	£92,000
Discretionary Housing Payments	220	£181,000
Total	34,031	£2,486,000

NEXT STEPS

11.1 Delivery against the pillars within the Bury Cost of Living and Anti Poverty Strategy continues at pace across the partnership, against the backdrop of embedding the Let's Do It strategy and principles locally and ongoing socio-economic pressures.

11.2 Over the coming months there are key actions for the partnership which principally include:

- Further work utilising Ascendent and other key data sets to ensure effective targeting of resources to those residents requiring most support
- Continued roll out of the Family Hub model – which will act as a vehicle to support children and families experiencing hardship within their communities
- Further proposal to utilise Household Support Fund to provide eligible residents in need with Air Fryers / Microwaves – therefore providing more

focus on lowering their energy costs alongside financial support towards payments.

- Continued activity to promote work and training opportunities in place, to support residents back to work and help them achieve financial resilience – including the launch of new UKSPF Working Well – Steps to Succeed Programme in January 2024. Which consists of short and intensive interventions to support those at a significant distance from the labour market to approach their barriers to work. A specific offer to those aged over 50, that will unlock their potential and approach age specific barriers and the inequalities they experience.
- Meet the Provider event planned for February 24 and large-scale work and skills event in 2024.
- Completion of retrofitting the final 118 properties on Chesham. We forecast these to be complete by end of April 2025.
- Finalising the planning for 30 properties on Unsworth/Hunters Hill which we are due to commence summer 25 (depending on deep dive/intrusive surveys and designs)

RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 This report provides an overview of the recent, current and planned activities taking place across the priorities of Bury's Anti Poverty Strategy

12.2 The Committee is asked to note the report and outline any areas of further interest.

ACRONYMS

BCSN - Bury Community Support Network

CABB – Citizens Advice Bury and Bolton

DWP – Department for Work and Pensions

HSF – Household Support Fund

UKSPF – United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund

VCFA – Bury Voluntary and Community Faith Alliance

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