

TITLE	Anti-Poverty Strategy Development 2022-26
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 17 November 2021
WARD	None Specific
DIRECTOR	Graham Ebers, Resources and Assets

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Strategy in development sets out how the Council, along with our partners in the voluntary and community sector, will work with and support those suffering from hardship within our Borough, providing short term support, moving onto identifying and addressing the longer-term root causes of their poverty.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is requested to:

- 1) note development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy and the timeline;
- 2) consider Scrutiny input six months into delivery of the Strategy, to learn from progress to date and support development of the year 2 action plan.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The report sets out an approach for engagement of Overview and Scrutiny in the Anti-Poverty Strategy, recognising the input that the Cross Party Working Group is having in informing the development and approach taken within the strategy.

The report suggests that Scrutiny engagement in reviewing implementation of the Strategy after six months, to support development of the Year 2 action plan will add value to ongoing delivery of the strategy, whilst recognising the co-production with our VCS partners.

Background

The Council, along with our voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners are developing an Anti-Poverty Strategy to help address the hardships faced by residents in the borough on the back of the Covid19 pandemic. This Strategy works alongside the Recovery Strategy and the Equalities Plan in addressing the challenges faced by residents: tackling inequality.

The Strategy is being co-designed, co-produced and co-delivered with our VCS partners and their active engagement and contribution is critical to delivery of the strategy over the next five years.

The aim of the strategy is:

To work with partners to mitigate the effects of the poverty crisis

The Strategy takes in learning from extensive research done by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation over many decades and updated on the back of the pandemic and emerging data. Our strategic approach in Wokingham is designed to:

- **Challenge the stigma of poverty:**
To work in partnership with the voluntary sector, charities and residents to combat the stigma of low income and debt, to enable access for all to the services and support available
- **Improve the customer engagement experience:**
Enhance the customer experience and support for residents who are living in poverty, delivering one customer portal for access to support, and develop our workforce and continue to learn and grow
- **Create meaningful outcomes from cross party and partner initiatives to deliver change:**
Develop innovative, sustainable, cross Council and partner initiatives that can actively support those experiencing both long- and short-term poverty impacts
- **Be a catalyst for change in Wokingham, connecting council strategies and plans to impact the lives of our community:**
Be the catalyst that connects Council strategies, projects and plans that will have a positive impact on residents that are living in poverty, to drive positive impact and a cohesive approach

In delivering this, we will collectively work with three target resident groups which have been identified:

Persistent Hardship

These are residents on low incomes claiming universal credit or other benefits as well as housing benefit and council tax relief. They are the focus of the majority of existing government support, it may appear through Covid-19 that little had really changed for them, however the lack of school meals and being home did mean that their benefits did not go as far as usual and they were adversely affected.

Just About Managing

These are people who, before the pandemic, were just getting by on their own means without qualifying for support, although frequently they have little or no money left

at the end of the month; there is financial resilience. Due to the pandemic, they may have suffered redundancies, been furloughed with the associated drop in income, had reduced hours (including those on basic salary plus overtime that has been cut substantially), given up part-time work for home-schooling, given up work due to new mental well-being illnesses such as stress, anxiety and depression and are now sliding quickly into more poverty. As they have previously got by on their own without asking for support, they may be unaware of the support available to them and suffering from the stigma that can come from being in financial hardship.

Asset Rich, Cash Poor

These are people we would traditionally view as being comfortably off, they probably own a valuable home and earn well above the average. Through the pandemic they may have suffered either from being made redundant or furloughed; lost businesses or have struggling businesses. They may still have the same outgoings but with less money coming in have used savings to keep going or credit cards and are now slowly slipping into debt. Many people may only have savings to last them a month. Their assets are locked up in a family home, they may need support to help them make decisions on how to move forward and reduce the debt which they are facing.

Design and Delivery of the Strategy

The Cross Party Working Group will continue to be actively involved throughout development of the strategy and informing development of the Anti-Poverty Scorecard and Action Plan that are being co-produced with the VCS partners. The Strategy is proposed to go to Executive for approval and launch in March 2022, with delivery commencing from April. In reality, the Council and partners have been delivering short term measures to support those in hardship and alleviate the immediate impacts of this throughout the pandemic and will continue to do so ahead of formal adoption of the strategy.

Delivery will be overseen by a Hardship Alliance, being established with a small group of our VCS partners, to act as strategic leaders in the final stages of design and onto co-delivery. This approach is fundamental to success of the strategy and ensuring the continued ownership, engagement and input from our valued partners. This strategic group will be supported by regular wider engagement across the VCS.

Scrutiny Engagement

It is suggested that engagement of Scrutiny would be helpful six months into delivery, providing an opportunity to learn from early implementation, consider the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on poverty within the Borough and the effectiveness of early actions to address this.

Engagement at this time will also help to support development of the year two action plan, which will continue to be co-produced with our VCS partners and owned by the Hardship Alliance.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the Covid-19 crisis. It is, therefore, imperative that Council resources are focussed on the vulnerable and its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	TBC		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Some Government funding has been made available, which supports delivery of this strategy: further funding may also become available during the lifespan of the strategy. Through developing this strategy with our VCS partners, it will help them to align with the shared priorities and bring in funding to deliver the strategy and action plan.

Cross-Council Implications

Much activity is happening across the Council and our partners within the voluntary and community sector. Largely year 1 activity will build upon existing proposals, joining these together and being led by identified workstream leads.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Initial data analysis is seeking to look at the impact of poverty across the protected characteristics as far as possible from local or national data available. It is known that certain communities have been more adversely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and this strategy will help these people recover and address the challenges they are facing.

Climate Emergency – The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

Fuel poverty is one of the aspects that the Strategy will be addressing, whilst working with those facing hardship to support them in addressing their financial challenges in order that they are able to have the same choices that are available to others within the Borough. This will help them in being able to consider their impact on the environment and support they can give to enabling Wokingham Borough to be carbon neutral.

List of Background Papers

Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy presented to Cross Party Working Group

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