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| TITLE | Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee Recommendations to the Executive |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | The Executive on 21st March 2023 |
| WARD | None Specific; |
| LEAD OFFICER | Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson |
| LEAD MEMBER | Executive Member for Children's Services - Prue Bray |

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

1.1 The report asks the Executive to consider a set of recommendations in relation to tackling the current cost of living crisis, proposed by the Children's Services O&S Committee.

RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That the Executive approves the officers' responses to the recommendations in this paper and requests the Inclusion Cross Party Working Group to consider them alongside action planning.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3.1 The Children's Services O&S Committee, at its meeting on 2 November 2022, received a presentation from the Hardship Alliance about the cost of living crisis and how this is affecting children and young people in the borough. The recommendations contained in this report were agreed following a robust discussion about the difficulties being faced by families in the borough due the adverse economic situation.

3.2 The Committee aims to strengthen the Council's position in trying to find solutions to the difficulties in relation to tackling the effects of the cost of living crisis.

| Recommendation | Officer Comment |
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| 1) Supports Wokingham Borough Council to lobby the government to ensure adequate provision of Household Support Funding beyond March 2023, when the present arrangements end. | The council is lobbying on a number of aspects and is increasing lobbying around the Household Support Fund which has already been confirmed to March 2024, but we are seeking longer term commitment in line with that provided for the Holiday Activity & Food Programme through to March 2026. |
| 2) Supports efforts to help groups working to support families made vulnerable by the cost of living crisis, by looking at ways council-owned properties might be made available to assist such | The Council can utilise its property portfolio to support the work of the VCS and has a process to match available properties to an identified and agreed need, and to agree cost & values of each transaction. |

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| <p>groups requiring premises for their activities.</p> | |
| <p>3) Work with Senior Council Officers to help improve communications between Council staff and local organisations, including the Hardship Alliance, to further increase awareness and understanding amongst Council staff about the current local offers of these organisations.</p> | <p>As part of the Tackling Poverty Strategy, there is excellent working with the Hardship Alliance, whilst the council has mechanisms in place to increase engagement and joint working with the VCS. Support available has featured within the Big Chat for staff and has been regularly communicated through staff bulletins, with many staff also living in the borough and therefore receiving the all house mailing on cost of living support. The offer to households continues to evolve and therefore the ongoing communications campaign will continue to highlight changes in the offer. This is being supplemented with further internal communications in addition to continued signposting to the cost of living support pages available on the website to help staff refer residents, or to be aware of what support is available if they need it themselves.</p> |
| <p>4) Request that Officers investigate possibilities for a local volunteer scheme for Council staff; and explore ways of using the Council's Communications Team to support volunteer recruitment from amongst the public.</p> | <p>The council has increased working with Wokingham Volunteer Centre since the start of the cost of living crisis to facilitate volunteer recruitment across the borough. This is supported by communications from the council and the volunteer centre with VCS partners being encouraged to refer in specific volunteer needs they have and engage in their own social media promotion to encourage volunteers, with numbers having dropped following a peak of volunteering during the pandemic. Further work on volunteering is planned as part of the Levelling-Up proposals submitted by the council last year, with funding becoming available in 2023/24 This work will seek to increase corporate volunteering and will include exploring opportunities for council staff.</p> |
| <p>To note: There are no financial implications currently identified which result from these recommendations. Any subsequent financial implications arising from the recommendations would be brought back to Executive.</p> | |

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

| | Cost/Savings | Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall | Revenue or Capital? |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|---|---------------------|
| Current Financial Year (Year 1) | None | | |
| Next Financial Year (Year 2) | None | | |
| Following Financial Year (Year 3) | None | | |

Other Financial Information

Finance has considered the report and has concluded that there are no current financial implications arising from its content or recommendations. Note that any subsequent financial implications arising from the recommendations would be brought back to Executive.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

n/a

Public Sector Equality Duty

It is recognised that the recommendations contained within this report are targeted at addressing socio-economic inequality. In line with the council's Tackling Poverty Strategy and reflecting the Socio-economic Duty of the Equality Act 2010, the council has incorporated socio-economic inequality within its equality impact assessment process. Any projects associated with these recommendations will be supported by an equality impact assessment.

Climate Emergency – This 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

n/a

List of Background Papers

Minutes of the Children's Services O&S Committee meeting on 2 November 2022: [Agenda for Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday, 2nd November, 2022, 7.00 pm - Wokingham Borough Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

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