

Meeting: Secure Sub-Committee

Date: 20 November 2023

Title: North Tyneside Council Cost of Living Support

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Service: Corporate Strategy

Wards affected: All

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the support available or planned for residents and tenants to help address the current cost of living increase.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Sub-Committee is recommended to note the contents of the report and identify any further work for inclusion in the 2023/24 work programme.

3. Introduction

Policy Context

- 3.1 In North Tyneside, around 1 in 10 residents live in an area that is ranked as the most deprived in England. The southern areas of the borough have the highest levels of deprivation, however there are pockets of deprivation in many wards. There are currently around 8,500 children or young people who are entitled to free school meals, and this has seen an increase of over 1,000 since the June 22 report to the sub-committee.
- 3.2 We know that the impact of poverty is visible at all parts of people's lives – from early childhood to educational attainment and employment rates through to

life expectancy – so to address this we need an approach that will tackle all these issues.

3.3 By listening to our residents and learning from their lived experience we have a comprehensive, partnership-based approach to tackle poverty and the impacts of poverty and to make a real and lasting difference to people's lives through: -

- the Our North Tyneside Plan which includes a policy priority to tackle health and socio-economic inequalities across the borough including through the Poverty Intervention Fund
- the health and wellbeing strategy "Equally Well: a healthier, fairer future for North Tyneside" which provides the framework for how this commitment in the Our North Tyneside Plan will be achieved
- a clear commitment to tackling poverty and the impacts of living in poverty by ensuring a healthy standard of living for all as part of the delivery plan for the "Equally Well" strategy.

4. Background Information

4.1 Since June 2020, our **Poverty Intervention Fund** and other grant funding from Government (Covid Winter Grant and the Household Support Fund) helped to alleviate the financial, social and health impacts of poverty for families and individuals across the borough through:

- **tackling holiday hunger** by continuing to provide supermarket vouchers directly to families who are eligible for free school meals during every school holiday since December 2020 – this is £15 per week per eligible child going directly to families.
- **Support for school uniform or clothing**
We have increased the number of schools which have been supported to develop their uniform policies to encourage more recycling and swapping with 19 schools now on board. A list of schools including those involved in these schemes are available on the cost-of-living pages on the North Tyneside website.

School staff have told us that they want to learn more about what opportunities there are out there to help families. To support this work, we held our first Uniform Summit in March 2023 to share good practice between schools.

Poverty proofing the School Day is a programme designed to identify barriers faced by children living in poverty when engaging with school life and help alleviate these. As of May 2023, 34 schools in North Tyneside have completed this process. The support around schools has continued and contributes toward North OF Tyne Combined Authority Child Poverty Prevention Programme.

- 4.2 Since Easter 2021 our **Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme** has supported children and young people eligible for income related free school meals to have access to meals and different activities delivered through a broad range of voluntary and community sector partners across the borough.

During summer 2023, match funding of £46,000 expanded the reach of HAF to allow more children to access the programme from low-income households who would have been otherwise ineligible. Over £500,000 funding was given to VCSE organisations to deliver activities within the community. 2048 children took part in the summer programme.

- 4.3 **Direct financial support** to people who struggle to pay their bills through.
- The **Council Tax support (CTS) scheme** which helps around 16,000 household pay their Council Tax bill.
 - A Hardship Payment reduction of £25.00 for pensionable age claimants and £150.00 for working age claimants of CTS against their Council Tax bill.
 - support for housing costs via **Housing Benefit and Discretionary Housing Payments**.
 - **Healthy Start Scheme** vouchers for pregnant women and children under four in eligible low income families – to be used on milk, baby formula milk and certain foods as well as free vitamin supplements.
 - **Household Support Grant** payments to support the costs of food and utilities plus items linked to these costs.
 - The **welfare assistance scheme** to provide help with the food (via the food bank) or utility costs.

- 4.4 **Support for those in financial hardship or crisis** through our Adults and Childrens Services is supported through **section 17 payments** which under the

Childrens Act 1989 can be made to provide financial assistance to address needs to safeguard and promote a child's welfare. The budget for 22/23 was £93,441, actual expenditure for 21/22 was £227, 478.

- 4.5 **Working with North Tyneside Council Comms team** to develop a space on the Council's website to signpost residents who need support during the cost-of-living crisis, can be viewed via the following weblink:
<https://my.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/1652/cost-living-support>

4.6 **Tackle food poverty and food insecurity**

A food strategy for North Tyneside has been drafted which has a focussed strand on food insecurity, some of the actions are to support the development of affordable food provision within communities across North Tyneside which address lack of access, skills and equipment to make nutritious food in local areas which have been identified as considerable risk of food insecurity.

A network of affordable food clubs, pantries and community shops are developing across North Tyneside which are focussed on making nutritious food accessible in local communities. This includes the Bread-and-Butter Thing, delivering food to up to 480 residents across 6 locations weekly. The hubs run in Whitley Bay, Collingwood Ward, Shiremoor, Longbenton, Howdon and Fordley with support from VCSE organisations and schools locally. In addition to this, there is a growing number of community stores supported by the Community Food Grant.

The Warm Welcome Programmes within VCSE locations over the winter will have a food focus with up to 10 venues delivering community cooking as part of the offer. Open access to a warm safe space for residents will become the basis of other wraparound services including equipment and skills to prepare nutritious meals at home.

4.7 **Household Support Grant Extension**

- 4.7.1 North Tyneside has been awarded £3,219,996.00 in government funding to support vulnerable households. This must be used by 31 March 2024. This grant is very similar to the previous Household Support Fund in that it must be used to support financially vulnerable households with food and fuel and expenses linked to these.

4.7.2 There is much more flexibility in how the funding can be used for different groups of residents.

4.7.3 With the above in mind the following proposals are to be delivered: -

- Continue to tackle holiday hunger through funding £15.00 per child per week of each school holidays.
- Through an application process online or telephone (Condition of grant to provide application based support most of the year, if not all) £1,200,000.00.
- Increased Crisis Support payments (immediate help) £100,000.00.
- Community led Warm Welcomes £75,000.00.
- Staffing costs around £129,000 to manage administration.
- Remaining funding used for other projects identified throughout the year.
- Welfare Support team to distribute grants as previous with an application process (with referrals from partners only) and using the fund for crisis payment support.
- Other projects that reduce inequalities identified through the PIF work or wider.