

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

18 APRIL 2024

**REPORT OF PEOPLE
SELECT COMMITTEE**

CABINET DECISION

Lead Cabinet Member: Leader – Cllr Bob Cook

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF COST OF LIVING RESPONSE

SUMMARY

The attached report presents the outcomes of the People Select Committee's review of Cost of Living Response.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S) / DECISION(S)

This topic was included on the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2023-24. The review is now complete, and the recommendations have been endorsed by the People Select Committee for submission to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That findings from this review will inform the development of the Council's Anti-Poverty Action Plan/Strategy as part of the 'Powering Our Futures' programme. This will be coordinated with partners and will advocate the importance of lived experience
- 2) That the Council continues to work with schools and governors to address the issues around the affordability of school uniform and provide options to expand the provision of pre-loved uniforms are explored, through devising an action plan clearly outlining the steps to be taken to address these issues. The action plan will be shared with the Committee and progress reported as part of the wider recommendations. In addition, the Council will meet with Multi-Academy Trust school improvement leads to advocate the need for affordable school uniforms and the ongoing promotion of pre-loved ones.
- 3) That the income maximisation service is widely promoted through Stockton News and social media channels as a means of assisting residents with debt management and financial difficulties.
- 4) That, building on the success of previous staff drop in sessions around Cost of Living this targeted approach continues where there is a need.
- 5) That, building on the existing success of the work undertaken, to continue to build on best practice from across the country working alongside the LGA.

DETAIL

1. The attached report outlines the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review of Cost of Living Response. The review has considered the key components of the cost of living approach adopted by the Council at a time of increasing service demands, for both advice and support. Consequently, it has explored the possibility to develop change, and, if appropriate, grow the Council's services around the cost of living work to support more residents in the Borough.
2. The Committee has taken evidence from Council Officers, Bright Minds Big Futures, and following partners/organisations:
 - Thrive Teesside, Catalyst
 - Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network
 - Unite the Union
 - Local Government Association
 - Tees Credit Union
 - Stockton & District Advice & Information Service.

In addition, the Committee visited two The Bread and Butter Thing Hubs during the course of the review.

3. Following approval by Cabinet, an action plan will be submitted to the Select Committee for their endorsement.
4. The report as attached was approved by the select committee and summarised evidence presented to the Committee over the preceding months. Progress has continued and many of initiatives referred to are now operational, as outlined below:

The Bread & Butter Thing

TBBT is now live at five venues across the Borough allowing residents to enjoy high-quality food shopping at lower costs to help boost financial resilience.

A maximum of 80 households can register for each venue and, currently, you can register to shop at:

- Teesside Vineyard Church, Thornaby (Mondays)
- Salvation Army, Stockton (Tuesdays)
- New Life Family Centre, Billingham (Wednesdays)
- Redhill Family Hub, Roseworth (Thursdays)
- Newtown Community Resource Centre, Stockton (Fridays)

Here to Help

Following the success of previous Here to Help events held across the Borough, we are excited to announce that planning is underway for a large-scale event to be held on Saturday 20 July 2024 in Stockton Town Centre. The focus of this event will be families and young people. As well as providing advice and support this event will offer a range of activities for residents to enjoy.

5. Currently, individual schools have established their own schemes to assist parents or carers with the cost of school uniform, including the availability of pre-loved uniforms. Assistance with school uniform costs vary across schools so it is advisable to check a school's website for specific information on uniform cost support. Several [clothing banks](#) across the Borough also stock pre-loved uniform and social media groups have been created for the purpose of offering pre-loved school uniforms. An updated mapping exercise of pre-loved uniform provision and support with school uniform costs across the Borough will be conducted as part of the action plan for this review.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

6. The review has highlighted how the existing challenges associated with poverty and inequality across the Borough have been compounded by the ongoing cost of living situation. The reviews recommendations seek to respond to persistent concerns and ensure that residents continue to be sufficiently supported.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

7. There are no corporate parenting implications identified at this stage.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8. There are no direct financial implications for the Council arising from the recommendations.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9. There are no legal implications identified at this stage.

RISK ASSESSMENT

10. The review is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

11. All wards will be affected by the recommendations.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

12. None.

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