

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

DATE 16 MAY 2024

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Leader - Councillor Robert Cook

A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees Progress Update

Summary

As members will recall Cabinet endorsed 'A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees: A Strategic Framework for Reducing Inequalities' in October 2021. The Fairer Stockton-on-Tees (FSOT) Framework details the Councils long term vision and commitment (over a 10 year period) to tackling inequalities in the borough. This report provides an overview of recent activity to address poverty and inequality including examples of how we work in partnership and collaboration with both our local communities and wider statutory and VCSE partners.

The FSOT Framework is fundamentally aligned to the Councils Powering Our Futures programme (specifically the Communities Powering Our Future and Transformation Powering Our Future missions).

Recommended that the report be noted.

Cabinet are asked to:

1. Note the range and variety of activity (detailed in **Appendix 1**) which has been undertaken or is ongoing in partnership with our local communities, VSCE and broader partners.
2. Note that whilst the FSOT Framework is aimed at addressing inequalities, due to the current economic situation and the cost of living challenges faced by many of the boroughs residents there has been a focus on addressing and mitigating the impact of poverty.
3. Note that work is ongoing with those with lived experience to develop an Anti-Poverty Plan (and supporting Action Plan) and this will be presented back to Cabinet at the September 2024 meeting.

Detail

Embedding FSOT within the Council

1. Since the introduction of a FSOT work has been ongoing to ensure that all Council employees understand the role they play in addressing inequality and that poverty and inequality are considered in all decisions made. A programme of promotional activity has been undertaken which has included the introduction of a FSOT logo (see **Appendix 1**),

the logo is intended to clearly identify activity which supports the Councils approach to address poverty and inequality and is used by all Council Service directorates.

2. To ensure all policies, strategies, and decisions (at all levels of the organisation) are considered with a “poverty and inequality lense” a Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment (EPIA) Toolkit is being developed. It is anticipated that the EPIA Toolkit (including guidance and templates) will be rolled out from summer 2024. This will include training/support for both existing colleagues and all new starters and will be incorporated within the ‘workforce development’ plan developed as part of the Colleagues Powering our Future workstream.
3. As members will recall one of the key commitments of the FSOT Framework was to consider the Council as a major Commissioner and purchaser. The Council has adopted a Social Value Policy which is directly aligned and supports key council strategies including the FSOT Framework. In addition a Corporate Social Responsibility working group has been established bringing together colleagues from across the Council, Catalyst and Thirteen with the aim of ensuring the boroughs local businesses can support the activities of our local VCSE organisations (by volunteering time, services and/or monies). This programme of activity will be ongoing and to date has included CRS Breakfast Networking events (which have brought business and VCSE representatives together) and a dedicated web page on the Catalyst website.
4. In April 24, Cabinet approved the scope of the 14 Transformation Reviews as part of the Powering our Futures Programme of activity. A number of these reviews such as the Early Help and Prevention Review will be cross cutting, outcome based reviews which will have a specific focus on in addressing and supporting those experiencing inequality.

Cost of living focused activity

5. **Appendix 1** provides a detailed overview of the work undertaken to directly support those who are experiencing poverty and or financial challenges. Some examples are detailed below:

Universal activity targeted to all residents of the borough:

- Establishment of a Here to Help Hub (a one stop shop) on the Councils website providing information on a range of support services available, from the Council and its wider partners.
- Cost of Living Booklets (2 to date). The initial booklet culminated in a 10,000 print run due to demand for copies from SBC venues, community and partner venues and wider venues such as GP’s services). Feedback from residents has been positive in terms of ensuring they receive timely advice on the range of support services available to them.
- Here to Help Events were held across the seven Community Partnership areas (between Sept 23 to March 24). Events brought together a range of support services (internal and external to SBC), events were well attended and positively received.
- Community Spaces (previously know as Warm Spaces) to date there is a network of nearly 70 Community Spaces who have developed not only to support residents over the winter months but are now implementing/developing a broader support offer (i.e. social isolation and facilitating leaning & skills courses). Most venues (supported by residents and VCSE partners) are committed to providing a year round offer and provide practical examples of communities, with some seed funding from the Council building on their strengths and supporting themselves.

Targeted activity

- Winter Warm Boxes funded through monies secured through Stockton District Advice and Information Service distributed to residents in need.
- Introduction of The Bread and Butter Thing (funded by Household Support Fund monies and Thirteen), five mobile food hubs have been established across the borough to provide affordable food to people on low income whilst reducing food waste, supporting nearly 400 families each week. Each Hub is now run by local volunteers and an anchor VCSE partner.
- Food Aid Fund (again monies secured by the Household Support Fund) supported over 60 organisations support residents struggling with food related issues.

Support to colleagues (Council and partner):

- Cost of Living quarterly newsletter. The quarterly e-newsletter was created to ensure colleagues have access to a range of information to best support and refer residents they are working with.
- Attendance at Staff Engagement Events to support colleagues who may themselves be experiencing financial pressures.

Consultation and Engagement

6. The FSOT Framework will support residents across all wards of the borough. Engagement with local ward members has and will continue to be undertaken when activity is locality focused.

Next Steps

Going forward

7. Examples of current / ongoing FSOT focused activities include:
 - The development of an Anti-Poverty Plan (and Action Plan). This work is being developed through a bottom-up approach ensuring that residents affected or have lived experience of poverty/financial insecurity can contribute and influence the Plan through a co-produced approach. For example, Thive (a local organisation advocating the voice of poverty lived experience) have both led on the recruitment and supported peer researchers who have carried out a range of interviews and developed case studies. Once drafted the Anti-Poverty Plan (and supporting Action Plan) will be presented to Cabinet.
 - A larger scale Here to Help event is planned for July this year. This event will be held on Stockton High Street, the event will include a range of activities for families and young people and will again be supported by a range of partner organisations.
 - As part of Project Harmony (operating within the Ropner Ward) the Council will continue to work with Cleveland Police and our wider statutory and VCSE partners. This will include working closely with residents to help empower communities to help them build on their strengths, improve community engagement with services and boost community confidence to strengthen trust and collaboration at a community level.
 - Ongoing support to local community groups and organisations, at the Clarences for example local residents are being assisted to develop support services which they have

identified and will be delivered by the community (including cost of living focused activities aimed at supporting those most affected/disadvantaged).

- Delivery of the 2024 Household Support Fund (6-month grant funding allocation covering April to September). Once again funding will be aligned to a number of initiatives which directly support low income and/or finally vulnerable households in the borough.

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