

Appendix 2: Scrutiny Board 15 March 2022: Financial Wellbeing Strategy

Board welcomed the introduction of a Financial Wellbeing strategy.

Board considered, that alongside the partner organisations already mentioned, that there were also three Tennent Management Organisations (TMOs) across the city, a Federation of Landlords and Housing Associations that could be included. It was thought that these partners could support the Strategy by ensuring that more people were aware of the help available in relation to areas such as fuel poverty.

Assurances were provided that work carried over the last few years had included TMOs and landlords who had received Covid grant money to help support vulnerable households. These groups had done an excellent job in helping to understand residents' situations and helping them to work through the problems they were experiencing. It was agreed that this linkage with the TMOs and landlords could be made clearer and that there was a definite intention to continue to work with them.

A request was made as to whether when providing ward maps showing areas such as deprivation that they show super output areas or neighbourhood areas, as deprivation could differ significantly across a ward.

Board noted the importance of community hubs and credit unions. Board considered that it was important for residents to be able to get the information they needed from close to where they lived and that services needed to be taken out to them, free of charge. Board considered that the Strategy would be very successful if local delivery pathways were developed and used.

Board considered the importance of measuring and evaluating the objectives in the Strategy and the use of benchmarks against which to monitor progress.

Board considered it vital to ensure that information in relation to the help on offer was provided in different languages and was pleased to hear that work was being carried out in relation to this with mapping exercises taking place to identify all the languages required.

Board considered that the matter of education in schools was vital in relation to financial wellbeing and that children learning about percentages from around year 9 could also be taught about APR to help protect them and their families from doorstep lenders.

Some Board Members also considered that the current allocation of £1.1 million for the Strategy might not be sufficient and requested some additional information as to how many households this budget would cater for. It was noted that this figure was based upon usage of DWP covid supports and guidance relating to these grants but that the process was still in the early stages.

Board considered that it was important to ensure that the new Strategy did not duplicate work already being carried out by organisations such as the Citizens Advise Bureau.

Board considered the matter of unemployment in the city. Board was pleased to see that the matter of youth unemployment was recognised, and action was being taken.

Board considered that organisations such as the construction college and the university would be vital to provide young people with the skills needed to enter into a skilled profession. Board noted that there was a high proportion of residents aged 50+ that were currently unemployed and considered how this generation could be upskilled to help them back into work. It was also noted that residents in this age bracket would need to ensure that they can have sufficient financial resources in place for retirement.

Board noted that the Strategy sought to encourage and educate people to claim the benefits that they were entitled to but also noted that some people did not want to claim benefits and wanted to provide for themselves. There was concern that this approach could lead some residents into welfare dependency and that the focus should instead be on getting people back into work. Board understood that the Strategy had been designed to look at financial hardship as a whole, both in the long and short term with a graduated response. It was recognised in the Strategy that some families would require immediate essential support to manage everyday life, some would require upskilling and others would need support to enter work.

The following recommendation was moved, seconded, and unanimously agreed by the Board:

That Cabinet recognise that the best thing the Council can do is to help people into work and to consider whether the £3million Wolves at Work programme can be extended to other age groups including the over fifties.