



| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Subject: | Update on Hardship Programme 2023/24 |
| Date: | 21 June 2024 |
| Reporting Officer: | John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy David Sales, Strategic Director of City Operations |
| Contact Officer: | Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty Nicola Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager Brian Carr, Portfolio Manager Margaret Higgins, Lead Officer, Community Services |

Is this report restricted? Yes No

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| After Committee Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| After Council Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sometime in the future | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

| | |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.0 | Purpose of Report |
| 1.1 | The purpose of this report is to update Members on the implementation of the 2023/24 Hardship Programme, which seeks to help alleviate the impact of poverty and the cost-of-living on vulnerable people across the city, and to provide an update on the budget position for a 2024/25 programme. |
| 2.0 | Recommendations |
| 2.1 | <p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. note the contents of this report including the update on the implementation and impact of the 2023/24 Hardship Programme; ii. consider the current budget position in relation to the development and delivery of a Hardship Programme in 2024/25, which seeks to support those most impacted by poverty and the cost-of-living crisis; and iii. consider and agree the proposed funding framework to be adopted to support the implementation of a Hardship Programme in 2024/25 (subject to the availability of funding). |
| 3.0 | Main Report |
| 3.1 | Members will be aware that the Council agreed, at its meeting in December 2023, the implementation of a £1,018,790 hardship scheme for the 2023/2024 financial year. The programme was funded through £724,600 provided by the Department for Communities, and £294,190 from Covid Support Grant underspends. |
| 3.2 | Members agreed that the hardship scheme would provide support and assistance to a range of cohorts including children and families, vulnerable individuals and families in emergency need and to enhancing the capacity of existing and high-impact support programmes. The design of the programme was based on the lessons learnt from previous schemes as well as discussions with the Members' Cost of Living Working Group and service providers in relation to potential areas of greatest need and impact from any such funding. |
| 3.3 | <p><u>Implementing 2023/24 Hardship Programme</u></p> <p>The delivery of the hardship programme ended on 31 March 2024. Appendix 1 provides a high-level progress update and what has been achieved through the intensive work by our delivery partners. It should be noted that the delivery partners attended and presented to a recent meeting of the Members' Cost-of-Living Working Group to provide members with an insight into the demand for and impact of</p> |

the funding. A copy of the slide-deck is attached at **Appendix 2** for information. In summary, key delivery highlights include:

- **121 schools** supported across the city have designed projects to support children through food projects, help with uniform/stationary costs or period poverty initiatives, with over **21,000 children supported** (28 schools still to provide returns – so this number will increase)
- **23 community day care providers** delivered **16,042 hot nutritious meals to 1,187 children**
- Save the Children provided support to **913 individuals** through their early years grants programme
- Family support hubs have supported **1,271 families**
- St. Vincent de Paul have supported **3,398 people in emergency need**
- Trussell Trust have **supported 4,514 people** through 3 food banks
- Fareshare have **distributed over 37 tonnes of food** to their network of community food banks
- NEA have **supported 625 households through the Warm & Well programme**
- Age NI supported **445 older people with fuel vouchers**
- Package of programmes for children & young people, older people and families have been delivered across the **26 council community centres**.
- **Seven independent community facilities** have received funding to deliver programmes.
- **21 social supermarkets have supported over 3157 individuals** as a result of the Hardship Programme investment. (Almost 10,885 supported through the total Social Supermarket Fund).

Feedback received from delivery partners on lessons learnt

3.4 A key area of feedback received from partners related to the pressure on funding having to be spent in-year (2023-2024) and the fact that the commitment and release of funding was late in the year. This effectively meant that delivery had to take place at pace over a three-month period from January to March. This operating environment is difficult and creates pressure on officers and partners throughout programme design, delivery & monitoring stages. Partners highlighted that the level of demand for support was unprecedented and has become an all-year-round challenge for many families. Whilst recognising the budgetary pressures faced by the Council, delivery partners did highlight the need for councils and central government to consider annual recurring funding going forward and how that this would enhance their ability to plan and deliver more positive outcomes for people.

3.5 Another key area highlighted by delivery partners was the usefulness and impact of the cost-of-living support guide prepared by Council and distributed widely across the city. This helped enhance people's awareness and understanding of the types of support available across the city and to improve referral and signposting processes.

3.6 Members will note that a **Market-Place event** has been scheduled in City Hall in October 2024, It's purpose will be to recognise the impact of the hardship programme, what support has been delivered across the city as well as providing an opportunity for members of the public and delivery organisations to learn about available services and support. This event will also explore the potential to establish a stakeholder network of organisations that are working to help address poverty and cost-of-living issues through relevant services.

Budget Position for 2024/25 Hardship Programme:

3.7 As outlined earlier in the report, the 2023/24 Hardship Programme was funded through £724,600 provided by the Department for Communities, and £294,190 from Covid Support Grant underspends. The previous year (2022/23) the Fuel Poverty Hardship Programme was funded through £1.1m of Council funding.

3.8 At present, there is no certainty around funding from the Department for Communities and there is no Council allocation towards a 2024/25 Hardship Programme. While some underspend from previous years is available, the impact of this would be much less than in previous years unless additional funding can be secured.

3.9 Members may recall that at the April committee meeting SP&R agreed to provide £122,627 to fund 21 Social Supermarket Projects in the absence of a Letter of Offer from DfC to fund this area of work. In previous years DfC has provided significant funding to support social supermarkets, approximately £415,000 in 23/24. The current position is outlined in the table below.

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Current available Hardship Programme 24/25 budget (from identified underspends) | £223,400* |
| Commitment to provide 25% funding to 21 Social Supermarket Projects (April SP&R) | £122,627 |
| Current Balance for Hardship Programme | £100,773 |

Strategic approach to future commissioning of hardship support

3.10 Based on feedback from delivery partners and in order to ensure that the Council can move at pace when Hardship Funding becomes available Members are asked to consider and agree to the development of a procurement framework, which will allow funding to be distributed at pace to organisations with experience & capacity and provide the Council with assurance in relation to Audit, Governance & Risk.

Development of Funding Framework for 2024/25 Programme:

3.11

Based on constructive and positive discussions at the Cost-of-Living Task Group meetings, as well as learning from delivery partners Committee is asked to agree the following approach towards the delivery of the 2024/25 Hardship Programme (subject to the availability of funding):

(i) Thematic focus of support

The Hardship Scheme will seek to support those most vulnerable affected by the cost-of-living crisis with a key focus on enhancing the capacity of existing organisations across the following themes:

- Support to children and young people and families;
- Support to individuals/families in emergency need; and
- Support for older people.

(ii) Design principles

The Members' Cost of Living Working Group agreed that the following guiding principles to inform and help shape the design of the emerging Hardship Fund.

- **Dignity** - delivered in a way that maintains the dignity of the person accessing support.
- **Needs driven** - targeted at those most in need and can demonstrate this.
- **Wraparound** – any individual accessing emergency support should be offered access to other wraparound services to help address need on an ongoing basis.
- **Promote sustainability** – not displace/ duplicate but add value to what is already in existence.
- **Delivery Infrastructure** - proper infrastructure (internally within BCC and externally within other organisations) is in place to support the delivery of support.

Suggested Next Steps

3.12

Members are asked to consider the next steps in taking forward a Hardship Programme for 2024/25:

| Task | Target Date |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Update SP&R on delivery of 2023/24 Programme and seek views on budget position for 2024/25 | June 2024 |
| Develop a funding framework based on Members feedback | July/August 2024 |
| Seek feedback from the Cost of Living Task Group | September 2024 |
| Seek ratification on approach from SP&R | September 2024 |

| | | |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Market Place event to enhance signposting and referral processes across the city | October 2024 |
| | Establish delivery mechanisms | October 2024 |
| | Design & Distribute Cost-of-living Support Guide | October 2024 |
| | Delivery of Hardship Programme 2024/25 | November 2024 – March 2025 |
| | Financial & Resource Implications | |
| 3.13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is currently £223,400 allocated identified from underspends for a Hardship Programme in 2024/25. However, there is a Commitment to provide 25% funding to 21 Social Supermarket Projects (April SP&R), which will potentially use £122,627 • This would leave £100,773 for the delivery of a Hardship Programme in 2024/25 • Given the fact that no Letter of Offer from DFC for Social Supermarkets has been received it is difficult to accurately plan the financial allocation for delivery of a Hardship Programme 24/25. | |
| | Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment | |
| 3.14 | An Equality Screening and Rural Needs Assessment was undertaken for the delivery of the 2023/24 programme. This will also be the case for the delivery of any Hardship Programme for 2024/25. | |
| 4.0 | Appendices – Documents Attached | |
| | Appendix 1: Update on Cost-of-Living Hardship Programme 2023/2024. Appendix 2: Slide deck provided to Cost of Living Task Group on 6 th June 2024 | |