

Cost of Living Working Group

Thursday, 6th June, 2024

COST OF LIVING WORKING GROUP MINUTES HELD IN HYBRID FORMAT

Members present: Councillors Bradley, Doherty, Flynn and I. McLaughlin.

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. N. Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Mr. K. Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty;
Ms. M. Higgins, Lead Officer, Community Provision;
Mr. C. Tubridy, Hardship Programme Co-Ordinator; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Election of Chairperson

Moved by Councillor Bradley,
Seconded by Councillor I. McLaughlin and

Resolved - that Councillor Flynn be elected to serve as Chairperson of the Working Group until the date of the Annual Council Meeting in 2025.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor Nelson.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Hardship Programme 2023/2024 overview

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty provided the Working Group with a comprehensive overview of the Hardship Programme 2023/2024.

He reminded the Working Group that the Council had agreed, at its meeting on 1st November, 2023, to allocate £1,019,000 through the Emerging Hardship Fund amongst the following three themes: Support to Children and Families, Support for Individuals and Families in Immediate (Emergency) Need and “Enhancing the Capacity of Existing Structures and Programmes”.

The Members were reminded that the design principles of the Programme included that it would be delivered in a way that maintained the dignity of the person accessing support, which targeted those most in need; that any individual accessing emergency support should be offered access to other wraparound services to help

address need on an ongoing basis and to prevent a cliff-edge. The Programme also aimed not to displace or duplicate any services, but rather to add value to what was already in existence, and effective infrastructure was put in place to support delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

The Working Group was reminded that £1,002,852 funding had been allocated as below, under the three themes.

Theme	Partner(s)	Funding Allocation (indicative)
1. Support to Children and Families	Schools via Education Authority	£250,000 (increased to £260,380)
	Sponsored/Community Day-Care (Children 0-10 years age / vulnerable children)	£24,000
	Save the Children	£100,000
	Family Support Hubs (network of 10)	£175,000
2. Support for Individuals & Families in Immediate (Emergency) Need	SVDP	£75,000
	Age NI	£50,000
	Generalist Advice Providers	£20,000
	Trussell Trust	£30,000
	Fareshare	£40,000
3. Enhance Capacity of Existing Structures & Programmes	Winter Wellbeing Community Programmes	£15,000
	Warm & Well Programme	£75,000
	Social Supermarkets	£165,000
	TOTAL	£1,029,380

The Hardship Programme Co-Ordinator provided the Working Group with a detailed overview of the impact of the programme and how funding had been distributed throughout each District Electoral Area.

He explained that the funding through the Schools Programme had included food-based projects, uniform/clothing support, stationery support, period products and holiday hunger. The Working Group was advised that a number of schools were yet to return their monitoring forms and, until those were returned, the final impact could not be determined.

The Working Group was advised that an article detailing the success of the Fund would be published in the upcoming City Matters magazine and that vox pop videos with

a range of delivery partners, including Schools, were being captured and would be posted across the Council's social media.

It was also reported that a Hardship/Anti-Poverty event would be held in the City Hall in October 2024, to showcase the great work taken forward through the hardship programme as well as raising awareness of the type of support services and referral pathways which existed across the city.

The Working Group noted the update which had been provided.

Delivery Partner Updates

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives from the hardship delivery partners to the meeting:

- Charlene Mitchell (Family Support Hubs)
- Lisa McComish Brennan (Sponsored Day Care)
- Sinead Kelly (Save the Children)
- Colm Crummey (SVDP)
- Paschal McKeown (Age NI)
- Helen Newell (Trussell Trust)
- Edel Diamond (Southwest Foodbank)
- Declan McKillop (Fareshare)
- Hugh McVeigh (National Energy Action)
- Christine McKeown (Ashton Centre)
- Jacqui Frazer (Social Supermarkets)

In turn, they each provided the Members with a short overview of the support which their projects had delivered, along with some constructive feedback and lessons learned.

The Lead Officer, Community Provision, provided the Working Group with an outline of the Winter Wellbeing programme which had been delivered through 17 of the Council's Community Centres as well as 7 independent Community Centres.

During discussion, a number of the representatives highlighted that they had worked closely with other delivery partners, ensuring effective signposting towards the help which was needed by those they had been supporting. They also highlighted that the scale of demand for support was unprecedented and an all-year round challenge for many.

A number of the delivery partners mentioned the short timeframe in which they had to work in terms of funding committed, however, they stated that the feedback from users had been fantastic. In respect of any future Hardship Programme, they requested that more flexibility be allowed in terms of what the money could be spent on. The Lead Officer, Community Provision, pointed out that a number of the conditions of funding had been imposed by the Department for Communities as part of the letter of offer.

The Members thanked the representatives for their contributions and for their hard work across the City and they retired from the meeting.

Noted.

Consideration of a 2024/2025 Hardship Programme

The Neighbourhood Services Manager advised the Working Group of the current financial position in respect of a potential Hardship Programme for 2024/2025. The Members were reminded that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting in April 2024, had agreed to commit 25% funding to 21 Social Supermarket projects. She pointed out that there was still no certainty around funding from the Department for Communities for Social Supermarkets or for Hardship Funding for 2024/2025.

Noted.

Consideration of Future Funding Framework

The Hardship Programme Co-Ordinator outlined that officers would be seeking Members' support for the development of a funding framework with would support a more strategic approach to commissioning hardship support and enhancing capacity of existing structures and programmes to support children and families, older people and those in emergency need.

He outlined that the development of such a framework would enable procurement to be planned and would allow funding to be distributed at pace to organisations with the experience and capacity to deliver necessary support services, as well as providing Audit and Governance assurance.

The Working Group was advised that the feedback from delivery partners stated that annual recurrent funding throughout the year was needed and would have more of an impact.

Noted.

Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in September, with the date to be agreed with the Chairperson.

Chairperson