

Cost of Living Working Group

Tuesday, 12th November, 2024

MEETING OF THE COST OF LIVING WORKING GROUP

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOТЕLY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Flynn (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors Doherty, McLaughlin and McAteer.

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

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th September were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

Hardship Programme 2024/25

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty presented an update report on the current budget position in respect of the development and delivery of a Hardship Programme for 2024/25 to support those vulnerable people most impacted by the cost-of-living crisis across the city. He also provided a detailed overview of the 2023/24 Hardship Programme, including a breakdown of the total funding allocated, themes supported and funding per District Electoral Area.

He reminded Members of the Council's Anti-Poverty Networking Event, held on 29th October, and the launch of its cost-of-living support guide. He informed the Members that the networking event had provided valuable engagement with key stakeholders and highlighted the positive feedback received.

The Working Group was advised that the current funding available to support a Hardship Programme in 2024/25 was £100,773, which was significantly lower than previous years, and that the Department for Communities was currently not allocating any hardship funding for this period. Members were reminded that, at its meeting in October, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee had agreed that £1million of VAT receipts be ringfenced towards the Hardship Programme. Accordingly, the current budget position for the programme was £1,100,773.

In addition to the current budget for a 2024/25 Hardship Programme, it was reported that £785,744 had been secured through the Department for Communities, to support social supermarkets across the city.

The Working Group was advised that the proposed funding allocation for 2024/25 focused on the key themes and design principles, that had been previously agreed by the Working Group.

Thematic Focus

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

Design Principles

- 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; and
- Delivery Infrastructure – proper infrastructure (internally within BCC and externally within other organisations) is in place to support the delivery of support.

The Working Group was provided with details of the proposed funding allocation and delivery model as set out below:

Theme	Proposed Delivery Partners	2023-24 Allocation	2024-25 Proposed Allocation
Support to children, young people, and families	Schools via Education Authority	£250,000	£250,000
	Sponsored/Community Day Care	£24,000	£25,000
	Family Support Hubs	£175,000	£200,000
	Save the Children	£100,000	£150,000
Support to individuals/families in emergency need	Society of St Vincent de Paul	£75,000	£100,000
	Trussell Trust	£30,000	£50,000
	Fareshare	£40,000	£50,000
Support for older people	National Energy Action	£75,000	£150,000
	Age NI	£50,000	£100,000
	Winter Wellbeing Programmes	£15,000	£25,000
		Total	£1,100,000

The Working Group was informed that officers would continue to engage with Age NI in relation to its capacity to deliver the proposed allocation of £100,000, and that an update in respect of that would be provided to the Members in due course.

During discussion, Members thanked officers for the work carried out to date in respect of the development of the programme and highlighted the benefit of the 2023/24 programme in supporting those vulnerable people across the city that were most impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.

Taking account of the planning and preparation required by officers and delivery partners in respect of a Hardship Programme for 2024/25, it was proposed that the delivery period for partners be extended to June 2025, subject to the approval of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Members agreed that the proposed extension would be of benefit to the delivery partners.

Members expressed concern in respect of the hardship faced by older people over the winter months that had been exacerbated by changes to winter fuel payment eligibility. Members highlighted the need to, should additional funding be obtained, provide further support to older people, and ensure it is spread equally across the city.

Next Steps

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty informed the Working Group that its discussions and recommendations would be collated and reported back to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Working Group agreed that the report be brought to the November meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group noted that the date and time of the next meeting would be agreed in conjunction with the Chairperson.

Chairperson