

## **Tackling Poverty**

### **Introduction**

This Appendix sets out a range of measures, some of which are already in place and some of which are developed by the proposed Budget.

### **Welfare Support**

In April 2013 the Department for Work and Pensions ceased to operate the Social Fund and provided local government with Local Welfare Support Funds to administer as it saw fit.

In Bath & North East Somerset we were allocated a sum of £250,000 per annum for the fund and a further £50,000 per annum towards administration costs.

We set up a small team to administer this fund along with a further £250,000 for Discretionary Housing Payment awards. We approved a Local Welfare Support Policy and the team have gone on to develop a wide range of support services for our most vulnerable customers, including provision towards food, shelter and warmth, supported accommodation, help towards payment of debt, debt advice and back to work help.

The support provided is on a non cash basis, so it is delivered by providing things like online shopping; white goods; direct payment of Council Tax etc. These awards are made following detailed conversations with the customers to ascertain the best way of supporting their needs.

### **Maintaining the Social Fund at £250K for 2015/16**

In 2015/16 the Local Welfare Support funding will no longer be a direct grant from the Department for Work and Pensions as it has been handed back to the Treasury and in theory will form part of the overall settlement.

As detailed in the Budget report, the Council intends to continue supporting Local Welfare Support activity, including administrative costs and additional support for the provision of basic needs.

### **Work with Partners to help Residents with Pay Day Loans**

In developing Local Welfare Support, the Council works closely with a range of partners such as the Credit Union, Housing Providers and Advice Agencies to provide debt advice and support, in order to reduce the impact of pay day loans and other financial burdens. We have helped around 112 Council Tax payers this year so far where they have been adversely impacted by the changes in Council Tax Support and we are planning to support CURO in the launch of an initiative with My Home Finance through our One Stop Shop in

the near future to help those people who may normally impacted most by taking out Pay Day type loans.

The Council has also recently launched a new strategy for Advice & Information which will help us to work with partners to reduce duplication and target our limited resources effectively.

### **Support our Local Food Banks**

We have worked very closely with food banks across Bath & North East Somerset since the introduction of the Local Welfare Support Team by issuing vouchers and providing some financial support to enable them to work effectively. We have also provided retail vouchers, online shopping; Julian House meal vouchers and help towards utility costs to 851 applicants this year to-date.

In 2015/16 we intend to continue to develop relationships with our local food banks and partners to ensure resources and facilities are available to continue this good work and are targeted to the right people.

### **Continue to develop our Connecting Families Programme**

As part of an ongoing review of how we administer Welfare Support and, in particular, target the most vulnerable the Local Welfare Support Team continue to work closely with the Connecting Families Team and over the next few months plan to trial a new way of working which will see some of the most vulnerable cases identified through the Welfare Support gateway being triaged to a small team working alongside the Connecting Families Team to deliver a more holistic and long term solution.

This approach has been developed through consultation and workshops held as part of the Council's contribution to the Local Government Transformation Network and are of interest to the Department for Work and Pensions as potentially a future model for payment by results through Universal Support.

### **Work to reduce Adult and Youth Unemployment**

As a pilot live site for Universal Credits and through work with the Transformation Network we continue to develop joined up working solutions with the Job Centre, partners and Council departments. The number of JSA claimants is now less than 1,000.

We continue to pursue conversations with the Job Centre about co-location of offices and, at present, have one officer from the DWP working from our One Stop Shop with further DWP resource to be provided to support our Connecting Families programme in the future.

**Remove some Lower Pay Bands to help Low Paid**

The Living Wage is an hourly rate set independently of any employer group and is based on principles of preventing in-work poverty. This requires that a wage takes account of area-specific costs of living as well as the basic expenses involved in supporting a family. The current UK rate (November 2014) is £7.85 per hour and is supported by a variety of employers across the public, private and third sectors with a stated aim of preventing 'in-work poverty.' Advocates consider that the Living Wage is the minimum necessary to provide adequate income to ensure economic and social wellbeing.

The Council's pay arrangements reflect the need to recruit, retain and motivate skilled employees to ensure high levels of performance balanced with accountability on the public purse. Currently, the lowest salary offered for substantive, full time employment is £ 13,500 pa rising to £ 13,614 pa in October 2015 whilst this meets statutory National minimum wage requirements (£6.50 per hour) it falls short on the ' Living Wage' (see above).

Subject to trade union consultation, it is proposed to increase minimum pay rate for the Council's direct work force from 1 April 2015 to a sum that equates to Living Wage (UK) rate in 2015-16 and thereafter to review this sum annually taking account of national local government pay rates and the published Living Wage rate.

Based upon current workforce figures around 550 Council and schools workers, many part-time would benefit from this proposal.