

Rother District Council

Report to: Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group

Date: 18 August 2020

Title: Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group: Next Steps

Report of: Joe Powell – Head of Service – Housing and Community

Purpose of Report: To determine the approach of the Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group towards meeting its stated aims and objectives.

Officer

Recommendation(s): It be **RESOLVED**: That:

- 1) The amendments to the timeframes for the Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group in Appendix A be agreed;
 - 2) The proposed approach to research and evidence gathering proposed in Appendix B be agreed; and
 - 3) The strategy and action proposals outlined in Appendix B be noted.
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Introduction

1. At the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 25 November 2019 the draft terms of reference for the Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group (APT&FG) were approved as was the formation of the APT&FG.
2. The stated aims and objectives of the group can be found within the terms of reference at Appendix A, these are:

Aims

- contribute to the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Rother; and
- identify new ways of working to reduce poverty and hardship within the District.

Objectives

- To undertake a review of the accessibility of appropriate financial products, including an analysis of the forms of less appropriate forms of credit and the extent of their use.
- To assess how residents are educated about finances and consider what improvements can be made to financial literacy in the District.
- To consider the impact of Council Tax Reduction policy and the accessibility of Council Tax Reduction to those experiencing financial hardship.
- To consider the impact of Council administered discretionary housing benefit payments (DHP) its accessibility and the processes used to allocate DHP to those at risk of homelessness.

- To investigate the availability of financial advice, homelessness advice, employment and training advice and the role of the Council in supporting these.
 - To investigate the availability of affordable fuel, food and other provisions and the Council's role in supporting these.
3. The impact of COVID-19 has meant that the approved timetable for the APT&FG has not been followed and a revised timetable is included at Appendix A for the Groups' information and agreement.

The Rother Alliance Anti-Poverty Proposals

4. Councillor Sam Coleman has developed with colleagues a series of proposals for consideration by the APT&FG which can be found at Appendix B.
5. The proposals fall into two categories; the first is the proposed approach to research and evidence gathering to inform the Group's future recommendations; the second is the proposed strategic approach and actions which might be included in a final Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Research and Evidence Gathering

6. The aims of the research and evidence gathering proposals are:
- **Collect** evidence from residents, outside bodies and organisations on the levels of poverty in key user groups, especially within lower socio-economic areas.
 - **Assess** restrictions and possibilities surrounding the council tax reduction scheme.
 - **Identify** best practice and areas for improvement in relation to combating and dealing with poverty.
7. It is proposed that officers adopt the approach outlined in Appendix B and develop a series of evidence gathering sessions to be held virtually with relevant partner agencies and services. It is proposed that a number of sessions be held to establish the impact of poverty on a range of key user groups, detailed within Appendix B, with each session focussing on the following aspects of poverty:
- Education and employment opportunities
 - Health inequalities
 - Housing inequality and homelessness
 - Rural poverty and deprivation

Strategy and Action

8. The aims of the Strategy and Action proposals are:
- **Improve** how the council's existing services and responsibilities are carried out
 - **Implement** new schemes and initiatives
 - **Establish** an effective anti-poverty strategy

9. It is recommended that the Strategy and Action proposals be noted by the Group at this stage. The final strategic objectives of the group might be determined following the research and evidence gathering phase is completed, as detailed above. These final proposals from the APT&FG might also form the recommendations to Council, provisionally timetabled for May 2021, and then contribute to the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy per the stated aims of the Group.

Conclusion

10. The revised timetable for the APT&FG at Appendix A, is achievable within the resources available at this time and should be agreed by the Group.
11. Appendix B proposes an approach to research and evidence gathering that could be achieved across a range of sessions as described at paragraph 7 of this report, in line with the revised timetable at Appendix A.
12. The group should finalise its strategic objectives and actions after having completed research and evidence gathering.

Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference

Anti-Poverty Strategy Task and Finish Group

1. Aims and origin

- 1.1 The Council has a longstanding role in tackling poverty and raising aspirations with its partners, something that is at the centre of the aims of its Corporate Plan 2014-2021:
- An Efficient, Flexible and Effective Council
 - Sustainable Economic Prosperity
 - Stronger, Safer Communities
 - A Quality Physical Environment
- 1.2 The aims of the Group are to:
- contribute to the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Rother and
 - identify new ways of working to reduce poverty and hardship within the District.

2. Objectives

- 2.1 To undertake a review of the accessibility of appropriate financial products, including an analysis of the forms of less appropriate forms of credit and the extent of their use.
- 2.2 To assess how residents are educated about finances and consider what improvements can be made to financial literacy in the District.
- 2.3 To consider the impact of Council Tax Reduction policy and the accessibility of Council Tax Reduction to those experiencing financial hardship.
- 2.4 To consider the impact of Council administered discretionary housing benefit payments (DHP) its accessibility and the processes used to allocate DHP to those at risk of homelessness.
- 2.5 To investigate the availability of financial advice, homelessness advice, employment and training advice and the role of the council in supporting these.
- 2.6 To investigate the availability of affordable fuel, food and other provisions and the Council's role in supporting these.

3. Background

- 3.1 At its meeting on 14 September 2019 the Overview and Scrutiny resolved to establish a Task and Finish Group to consider how to deal with issues of poverty and hardship within the District.
- 3.2 Due to substantial changes in the benefits system, the services that the Council operates, the increase in the cost of living and the current economic

climate the Council needs to identify measures it can take with its partners to help alleviate hardship.

4. Resources

- 4.1 Nominations will be confirmed in terms of membership of this Task and Finish Group.
- 4.2 The group will be supported by officers from the Corporate Core, Policy and Housing and Community services and such others as the Panel deems appropriate.
- 4.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be invited to input into the review and will be kept informed of the Panel's progress.
- 4.4 External organisations will be invited to give evidence to the Panel.
- 4.5 It may be necessary for the Panel to appoint expert witnesses to assist with its work.

5. Timetable

- 5.1 It is proposed that the work of the Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group is scheduled as follows (a further detailed timetable will be determined following agreement of these Terms of Reference):

	Purpose
1	Evidence/Information Gathering Collate evidence against all objectives <i>Indicative time frame: October 2020</i>
2	Consolidation Meeting To consider the evidence and any additional information, and agree recommendations <i>Indicative time frame: November 2020</i>
3	Final Report To agree the final Draft Report before referring it to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration and approval. <i>Indicative time frame: January 2021</i>
4	Implementation of Proposals Cabinet consider any policy/financial impacts of proposals for recommendation to Council – February 21 Full Council to consider and approve any proposals – May 21
5	Council Tax Reduction Scheme Post Full Council approval, carry out statutory 12 week consultation with major preceptors and community on any proposed changes to the scheme – March to April 2021

	<p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider results of consultation process and make recommendations to Cabinet – <i>June 2021</i></p> <p>Cabinet consider proposals – July 2021</p> <p>Council Consider proposals – Sept 2021</p> <p>Changes implemented – April 2022</p>
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