

Rother District Council

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 13 March 2023

Title: Recommendations of the Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive

Ward(s): All

Purpose of Report: To summarise the work of the Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group and outline the Group's Final Recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Officer

Recommendation(s): It be **RESOLVED**: That Cabinet be requested to consider that:

- 1) the Council has regard to the socio-economic duty when making decisions and that relevant policies and procedures be amended to reflect this; and
- 2) the socio-economic duty be reflected in the new Corporate Plan;

AND

It be **RESOLVED**: That progression of the delivery of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan and the effectiveness of the Cost of Living page on the website be noted.

Introduction

1. At Council on 21 September 2022, a Motion from Councillor Coleman was considered in respect of the Cost of Living Emergency which requested that the former Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group (APT&FG) be reconvened to give consideration to voluntarily adopting the socio-economic duty to affirm the Council's commitment to preventing and combatting hardship, with particular considerations to any impact on those with protected characteristics as outlined in the Equality Act 2010.
2. The APT&FG reconvened for a one-off meeting on 5 January 2023 and this report summarises the outcome from that meeting.

Background

3. Whilst there is no national policy agenda focused specifically on tackling disadvantage caused by socio-economic inequality, the Equality Act 2010 provided a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. Local authorities have statutory obligations under this Act and some Councils have chosen to build on these obligations to address key inequalities by voluntarily adopting and implementing Section 1 – the socio-economic duty.

The Socio-Economic Duty

4. Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 introduced a socio-economic duty on public bodies that required them: “when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise its functions” to “have due regard to the desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage”. Section 1 asked public bodies to consider how their decisions and policies could increase or decrease inequality that resulted from socio-economic disadvantage.
5. By voluntarily adopting the duty it would strengthen the ongoing anti-poverty work, support an inclusive economy, and equalities approaches, and contribute to the ‘levelling up’ agenda.
6. The Council would need to amend its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and processes, including the Equality Impact Assessment process and in doing so, ensure socio-economic inequality is considered in all future policy development such as the new Corporate Plan the new Corporate Plan, Regeneration Strategy, and Housing Strategy.
7. It will also be necessary to ensure appropriate training is in place for Members in having due regard to the duty in decision-making and officer training in how to apply the duty to inform new projects, service, and policy changes.

Next Steps for the Anti-Poverty Strategy – A Partnership Approach

8. Since the adoption of the Anti-Poverty Strategy in September 2022, Rother Voluntary Association (RVA) have taken on responsibility for resourcing meetings of the multi-agency Anti-Poverty Steering Group, which is governed by the Rother Local Strategic Partnership, and its meeting routinely and the Terms of Reference have been adopted.
9. One of the areas of focus has been taking forward a multi-agency hub in Bexhill. The Local Strategic Partnership will take a more active role in developing future iterations of the Strategy and its vision, together with ensuring its objectives are achieved. The APT&FG considered how the Anti-Poverty work could be integrated with other areas of work, such as the Health and Well-Being Strategy.

Cost of Living Information and Signposting

10. The APT&FG received an update from the Digital Transformation Project Manager on the performance of the Cost of Living page on the Council’s website, which had been promoted on MyAlerts and through social media platforms as well as a Facebook advert. At the beginning of January, the pages had attracted 1,415 views (200 of which were directly following the Facebook advert). The Warm Spaces item on the page was advertised on MyAlerts on 9 December 2022 and generated 700 views over the proceeding weekend, accounting for half of the total views to date. The APT&FG were pleased to note the effectiveness of the promotion.
11. The Cost of Living page had yielded a good level of views and was in the top 25 most viewed pages of the Council’s website. The page was made of an accordion design, which was more user-friendly on a mobile device. The page

would be advertised on Facebook again and an easier URL created for residents to remember.

Recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

12. It is recommended that:

- 1) the Council has regard to the socio-economic duty when making decisions and that relevant policies and procedures be rewritten to reflect this;
- 2) the socio-economic duty be reflected in any new Corporate Plan; and
- 3) progression of the delivery of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan and the effectiveness of the Cost of Living page on the website be noted.

Legal Implications

13. The Equality Act 2010 provided a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. Local authorities had statutory obligations under this Act and could build on these obligations to address key inequalities by voluntarily adopting and implementing Section 1 – the socio-economic duty.

Financial Implications

14. There are none arising directly from this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

15. Increasingly, Local Authorities are recognising the need to understand what tools and mechanisms are available to them to address the consequences of socio-economic disadvantage. Embedding the Socio-Economic Duty in the Council's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Equality Impact Assessment process gives us a mechanism to ensure we are considering the impact on different socio-economic groups in our decision-making.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	Yes
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Environmental	No	Access to Information	No
Sustainability	No	Exempt from publication	No
Risk Management	No		

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Appendices:	
Relevant previous Minutes:	C22/47
Background Papers:	N/A
Reference Documents:	N/A