

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Poverty Working Panel held online via the Zoom app on 18 January 2021

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 11.00 am and ended at 2.15 pm

22 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

23 Declarations of interest

Minute 27. Paper from Cllr Mike Allen.

Councillor Mike Allen, Personal, Member helps with a food bank at a local Church.

24 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 December 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2020 were approved as a correct record.

25 Paper from Andy Wood regarding outstanding queries

At the previous meeting two queries were raised regarding whether the Council had employees on zero hours contracts and what evidence existed around in-work poverty. The paper from Andy Wood addressed both queries and was noted.

26 Presentation by Lee Tozer - Partnership Manager for Devon and Cornwall - Department for Work & Pensions

A presentation was given by Lee Tozer, Partnership Manager for Devon and Cornwall, Department for Work & Pensions, which included the following points:

- Statistics relating to the Universal Credit caseload for East Devon (also available on www.Stat-Xplore.dwp.gov.uk) showing age, the breakdown by lower super output area and household data
- The response of Job Centre Plus to the pandemic lockdown
- Partnership working to support members of the public and benefit claimants
- The Job Centre Plus offer, highlighting the role of work coaches supporting people moving back into work
- Job finding support which provided a swift intervention for people who had been out of work for less than 13 weeks with the intention of getting them back into work as soon as possible
- The Kickstart Scheme which offered a six month work placement for 18 to 24 year olds and which had seen interest from a significant number of local employers
- Sector-based Work Academy Programme
- Flexible Support Fund which can be used to purchase support and provision to help overcome barriers to employment
- The response to redundancy including advice on benefits, pensions and skills training to help with moving into another job

The discussion included the following points:

- Job Centres have been re-opened since the first Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, with appropriate safeguards in place. Limited opening is in place during the current lockdown
- Certain sectors have seen a reduction in the number of job vacancies with these being off-set by an increase in other sectors
- With regard to a breakdown by gender of the data for households with no children, any information available would be circulated after the meeting
- The pandemic appears to be disproportionately affecting younger people with more help with employment aimed at younger age groups
- The New Enterprise Allowance Programme exists to help people set up their own business
- The Troubled Families Programme works with families with children who have contact with a number of support agencies and require a collective solution to multiple difficulties
- Universal Credit supports the employed and the self-employed on an equal basis and is dependent on earnings / income and is not differentiated by the type of employment
- Work Coaches support people of any age to get into work, including older age groups to transition to different employment sectors
- DWP was currently recruiting more Work Coaches to manage the increasing demand

The Chair thanked Mr Tozer for his presentation.

27 **Paper from Cllr Mike Allen**

The Chair agreed to re-order the agenda and consider Cllr Allen's paper at this point in the meeting.

Cllr Allen advised that the paper was intended to bring in items which had been proposed or discussed previously across a range of Council meetings and new ideas from other sources which could be considered.

The Chair thanked Cllr Allen for his paper and confirmed that the Panel would consider those items which the Council could implement within its remit.

John Golding advised that the draft Action Plan would continue to be refined until the Panel was satisfied that all points had been considered and included where appropriate.

28 **Update on support measures by Libby Jarrett - Service Lead - Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services and Corporate Fraud**

Libby Jarrett gave a presentation which covered four key areas for supporting low income households:

- Test and Trace Support Scheme
- Council Tax Reduction
- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and Exceptional Hardship Fund (EHF)
- Covid Hardship Fund

The following points were noted:

- The Test and Trace Support Scheme comprised the main scheme and a discretionary scheme to support people on low incomes with a fixed £500 award while they were self-isolating. The scheme will run until the end of March 2021
- Council Tax Reduction caseload continued to rise resulting in increased cost to the Council
- The introduction of the Firmstep software provided more data on Council Tax Reduction claims with more detailed analysis now possible
- In addition to existing hardship funds, DCC/DEFRA funding had provided emergency support by way of a Covid-19 Hardship Fund. There was discussion as to how long this funding would continue and whether the Panel should make representations to ensure that sufficient funds were available for the next financial year
- A Financial Resilience Officer was to be appointed to support the service
- Interventions would be focussed on areas of particular need, rather than specific locations being prioritised per se
- The Benefits Manager, Sharon Church, advised that the DEFRA funding had not only been used to provide emergency support, but also to help with identifying underlying issues and longer term needs of those in hardship and to assist people to maximise their income and minimise their expenditure
- Examples of partnership working were provided, for example, with Citizens Advice and local schools and case studies illustrated the Council's on-going work to support residents, often with complex needs involving finance, health and housing. Future monitoring and review would provide information as to how successful the Council's interventions were in the longer term

The Chair thanked Libby Jarrett and her team for their hard work administering the various Government initiatives during the Covid-19 pandemic, often at short notice.

Cllr King proposed that a recommendation be made to Cabinet that a contingency of £100,000.00 be allocated to the Council's Hardship Fund after April 2021 to be reduced by any additional funding coming forward from Devon County Council in the same timeframe. This was seconded by Cllr Millar and was agreed.

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET:

That a contingency of £100,000.00 be allocated to the Council's Hardship Fund after April 2021 to be reduced by any additional funding coming forward from Devon County Council in the same timeframe.

Updated Draft Poverty Strategy Action Plan - John Golding - Strategic Lead - Housing, Health & Environment

An updated copy of the draft Poverty Strategy Action Plan had been circulated with the agenda. John Golding advised the Panel that the draft Action Plan would be refined as the work of the Panel progressed. The Panel were reminded of the approach being adopted with a draft Action Plan on the agenda several meetings ago to be developed by the Panel and colleagues as we consider in detail each of the five high level objectives at these meetings.

The second draft of the Action Plan came to the last meeting with input from Andy Wood (objective 3 resulting in 9 actions), and this version on the agenda includes input from Libby Jarrett (objective 1 translating into 22 actions).

Service Leads have been invited to adapt and change the initial draft Action Plan and ensure that actions align with the high level objectives, and are deliverable within their Service areas.

Over the next two meetings we intend to have input from Housing in March (objective 2 and 4), preceded by Public Health in February (objective 5), by which time we should have a final version.

We will also be inviting our Community Development Workers and our Community Engagement & Funding Officer to input on the area of the Action Plan covering community and voluntary groups.

Once we have our actions the intention is to sit this alongside a narrative, which together becomes the Poverty Strategy.

We have just been through a service planning process and there are many cross references to poverty in Service Plans with commitments and actions that will also become part of this Action Plan.

The actions are mostly extensions of what we are currently doing or new initiatives and interventions within our sphere of influence.

It is proposed that we keep refining the Action Plan until we are satisfied that we have something that is achievable, deliverable, and will make a positive difference.

The draft Action Plan in its current form was noted.

30 **Poverty Dashboard of Key Performance Indicators - John Golding**

John Golding introduced the draft Poverty Dashboard of Key Performance Indicators which would allow for close monitoring of the Poverty Strategy's effectiveness once adopted. The Poverty Dashboard could be available on the Council's website, or to Panel members. It was recognised that poverty is multi-dimensional and no single measure or metric is sufficient to provide a comprehensive picture of poverty in the district.

In order to track poverty effectively we need to see a variety of indicators and the best way of seeing these is in the form of a dashboard.

The Devon County Council website has some useful income, earnings and economic data. They also have useful deprivation, health equalities and other data in the form of a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

The Panel considered several examples of dashboards and concluded that we need to identify the measures that we want to track and produce a bespoke poverty dashboard relevant to us.

Our dashboard probably needs to include income; unemployment; welfare benefit recipients; homelessness; health equalities; community and voluntary group activity etc. This creation will require someone to set up the dashboard and significant IT input from Strata colleagues to pull the data across from various reliable sources.

The dashboard will probably be built up over a period of time and refined until it is what we want to monitor the effectiveness of our Poverty Strategy.

Cllr Millar requested that the minutes record the Panel's thanks to John Golding for producing a very good document.

In response to a question, John Golding advised that the Dashboard would include headline measures which could be supplemented with more detailed data sets providing information on, for example, homelessness, receipt of benefits and income.

There was general agreement that the approach taken was correct and that work on the Dashboard should continue as discussed.

31 **Poverty: Review of Council activities - Helen Wharam - Public Health Project Officer**

Helen Wharam presented the Poverty Review of Council Activities 2019-2020. This covers the year before the coronavirus pandemic. The Review period pre-dates the Poverty Strategy and provides a benchmark demonstrating some of the activities by council services to mitigate poverty during that period.

Once Service Plans for the next Council year were approved, they could form the basis for a further review of activities.

John Golding thanked Helen for her work which illustrated the core support which was already in place to assist those residents experiencing poverty.

32 **Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting would be held on 15th February 2021 at 11am and would include a presentation both from Citizens' Advice and from Helen Wharam, Public Health Project Officer. Members were invited to email any questions or issues regarding Citizens' Advice to either the Chair or Democratic Services Officers in advance of the meeting.

Future meetings will be as already agreed on the 15th March with a presentation by Jo Garfoot, the Acting Housing Service Lead and on 12th April when we should have a final draft of the Poverty Strategy.

As it seemed likely that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic would continue well into the year, the Panel agreed to continue to meet monthly for the first half of the year and then bi-monthly as required.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

M Allen

M Armstrong (Chair)

M Chapman

B De Saram
P Jarvis
F King
P Millar
M Rixson

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Arnott
P Faithfull
S Gazzard
P Hayward
D Ledger
K McLauchlan
A Moulding
J Rowland
E Rylance
E Wragg

Officers in attendance:

Sharon Church, Benefits Manager
Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance
Jo Garfoot, Acting Housing Service Lead
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Susan Howl, Democratic Services Manager
Libby Jarrett, Service Lead Revenues and Benefits
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Helen Wharam, Public Health Project Officer
Andrew Wood, Service Lead - Growth Development and Prosperity

Councillor apologies:

S Hawkins

Chair

Date: