

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Poverty Working Panel held at Online via Zoom app on 17 October 2022

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.49 am

35 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

36 Declarations of interest

Cllr P Jarvis: Minute 38; Affects Non-Registerable Interest: Works for a charity with an income 40p above minimum wage, so is personally affected by the rising cost of living.

37 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 March 2022

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 March 2022 were noted as a true and accurate record.

38 Cost of Living Crisis - Winter Pressures Plan

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment presented the report which considered the cost of living crisis in the context of the Council's Poverty Strategy and alongside its commitment to support vulnerable residents through the challenging financial times.

The report proposed the adoption of a series of short-term measures to be implemented this winter and to be incorporated into a Winter Pressures Plan to help combat the worst impacts on vulnerable households. This will be a dynamic Plan that can be flexed in accordance with local intelligence and information appearing on the Poverty/Resilience Dashboard. An outline of the Plan was shown in an annex to the report.

It was recognised that much of the solution to the cost of living crisis is in the power of central government who steer social policy and make decisions on welfare benefits, price caps and hardship funding; however, the Council can play a useful role in ensuring resilience in the district's voluntary and community groups, supporting at risk households and operating a safety net for the least resilient households.

The Winter Pressures Plan pulls together a series of projects that can be deployed over the next few months, building on the Council's Poverty Action Plan and drawing together the work of partners, statutory and voluntary organisations who focus on cost of living, health & wellbeing and community development.

It was recognised that some of the district's most vulnerable people are tenants of the Council, and the Interim Housing Services Manager summarised the Housing Winter Pressures Plan which had been endorsed by the Housing Review Board

Discussion included the following points:

- Members commented on the valuable work of the Rough Sleeper Navigators, and the Working Panel will receive a presentation of this work, at its next meeting.

- Disabled people are particularly vulnerable with potentially higher energy costs, and those with mobility issues can struggle to access 'warm banks'. This is a group that the Council intends to be most supportive of, and support is already being targeted through the Energy Rebate Discretionary Scheme.
- Members would like some downloadable content to be able to hand to people who ask how they can access help, and which usefully signposts them to support.
- People need to see a map of warm/social community spaces and this information will be shared through social media and more traditional media, including a winter newsletter, to try to ensure it reaches everyone.
- There is some complexity since research has shown that targeting people for support can be counterproductive due to perceived social stigma, so it is important to be careful about how people are encouraged to ask for assistance if they need it, without them feeling unnecessary shame.
- It is intended to invite local MPs to meet with the district's food groups; Members of the Working Panel are welcome to join this meeting.
- One Devon is in the process of formally integrating health and social care, and it was encouraging to note in a recent meeting of leaders that the prevention, together with equalities and access to services, is high on the agenda. EDDC is pushing to ensure that work on poverty gets a fair share of the budget.

The Working Panel noted that the Winter Pressures Plan set out in the report had been adopted. The Working Panel will oversee and coordinate the implementation of the Plan.

39 **Social Resilience (Poverty) Dashboard**

The Service Lead – Revenues and Benefits and the Benefits Manager delivered a presentation outlining how the data from the Social Resilience (Poverty) Dashboard is used to support the work around the Winter Pressures Plan. This included:

- Most recently helping to inform the Discretionary Council Tax (Energy) Rebate Scheme – the majority of awards were made to households where a resident is disabled and/or a carer. Awards were also targeted to energy band E-H properties where households are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.
- Helping to inform targeted spend on the Household Support Fund 3. In line with Department for Work and Pensions guidance, Devon local authorities will be looking to award a payment to those residents who are not entitled to a cost of living payment. Also identifying households not on mains gas and who therefore do not benefit from the Energy Price Cap, some 477 of which are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction; and looking to provide targeted support to these households.
- Assisting the modelling and revision of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24.

Discussion included the following points:

- The Service Lead – Revenues and Benefits expressed confidence that 100% of the Discretionary Council Tax (Energy) Rebate Scheme funding will be deployed. Letters go out to residents encouraging them to apply and outbound calls are made when numbers were down to a level to start to engage with people over the phone. A briefing paper will be prepared for the Portfolio Holder for Finance on the outcome of the main scheme, for circulation to Members.
- It was recognised that there are a lot of good private landlords in the district covering the cost of the gas and electricity for their tenants and if the Council can lobby and tailor support under its control to assist these landlords, then it will do so.
- One Member expressed concern about funds becoming exhausted. The Service Lead – Revenues and Benefits responded that this is not currently the case but the position will be kept under review and where there is an issue, it will be brought to the attention of the Working Panel and Cabinet. She added that the Social Resilience team work creatively to support people to access funds from other sources, and the Council has its own hardship fund to draw on.

- Some Members would like to see parts of the dashboard published with data broken down by ward. The Service Lead – Revenues and Benefits stated an upgrade to the relevant IT systems needs to take place to enable a public facing dashboard to be published without sensitive or identifiable information.
- An update on the Breathing Spaces scheme will be brought to the next Working Panel meeting.

40 **Review of Poverty Strategy Actions**

The Public Health Project Officer presented a progress report on the East Devon Poverty Action Plan. The Action Plan was created to support the Poverty Strategy with the intention that the actions would be delivered over a period of time, dependent upon capacity.

The Action Plan comprises 61 objectives, some of which are subdivided, and many objectives shared by more than one Service. It is structured around five objectives with the following themes:

1. Helping people on low incomes
2. Strengthening families and communities
3. Promoting an inclusive economy
4. Addressing the high cost of housing
5. Improving health outcomes for people on low incomes.

Members were asked to consider i) what the timescale and process should be for continuing to update the Action Plan - it was suggested that the Working Panel receives light-touch quarterly updates, with yearly reviews/changes; and ii) what the mechanism should be for Service Leads to request changes, corrections or updates to the Action Plan.

During a discussion it was raised that the reports indicate that a high percentage of people applying for support are disabled, but some Members would like more clarity on what help people with disabilities are receiving and the impact.

Following the discussion, Members agreed that the Working Panel should receive a quarterly update on the Poverty Strategy Actions, with light-touch reviews annually. If there any requests for changes to agreed actions from Service Leads, these should be brought back to the Working Panel for consideration.

Members expressed thanks to the Public Health Project Officer for doing this work, and to the colleagues who contributed to it.

41 **Food Poverty update**

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

Attendance List **Councillors present:**

M Allen
M Armstrong
B De Saram

P Jarvis
D Ledger (Chair)
M Rixson

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Faithfull
I Hall
T McCollum
P Millar
J Rowland
E Rylance

Officers in attendance:

Sharon Church, Benefits Manager
Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Andrew Hopkins, Communications Consultant
Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer
Libby Jarrett, Service Lead Revenues and Benefits
Yusef Masih, Interim Housing Services Manager
Helen Wharam, Public Health Project Officer
George Whitlock, Data Analyst

Councillor apologies:

S Hawkins
T Woodward

Chair

Date: