

Appendix Three - Brent Poverty Commission – Delivery Plan

Workstream Three – Financial Inclusion and Welfare

Ref	Recommendation (in bold = priority)	Financial Implications	Update and Key Milestones	Lead Directorate/s
26	<p>We recognise that post-Covid there will be problems with debt for many households and we recommend that Brent puts its innovative emergency arrangements for grants and interest-free loans onto a longer term footing. We also recommend that advice services in the Borough are scaled up with a focus on tackling food and fuel poverty as well as debt advice.</p>	<p>Within existing resources.</p>	<p>July 2020 - The council introduced a resident support scheme in July 2020. It includes a grant and interest free loan element. Applications went live in August 2020 and the scheme will finish by April 2021. The council has received over 2,000 applications.</p> <p>August 2020 - To facilitate the work in this area the council has funded 2 posts (to 31 March 2021) at Brent Citizens Advice. It has also commissioned Hillingdon Credit Union to deliver the interest free loan element.</p>	<p>Customer and Digital Services</p>

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			<p>October – December 2020 - The council is reviewing the capacity of the Hubs in light of advice needs.</p>	
27	<p>We recommend that the council clarifies its local welfare assistance scheme with a designated budget, topped up with government funding including from the new hardship fund; providing support in cash rather than in kind; and relaxing the qualifying criteria of the scheme to reach those most affected by coronavirus.</p>	<p>Within the existing LWA budget. This has been agreed as part of the Financial Inclusion project.</p>	<p>October 2020 - The council will start the review of its Local Welfare Assistance scheme.</p> <p>February 2021- This review will include the long term plan for the council with the recommendation as part of the budget setting process in February 2021. The recommendations will include new eligibility criteria.</p> <p>Wherever possible payments will be made directly into the relevant accounts where the debt occurred e.g. rent arrears will be paid directly into bank accounts.</p>	<p>Customer and Digital Services</p>

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28	We recommend that the council works with credit unions to provide low-cost loans to cut down dependence on loan sharks and other unscrupulous lenders	Within existing resources. This has been agreed as part of the Financial Inclusion project.	Ongoing – see rec 26	Customer and Digital Services
29	We recommend that programmes such as the Community Money Mentors are rolled out across the Borough.	Yes – funding sources would need to be identified.	Advice4Renters have historically delivered this programme at a cost of £3,000 for a 6 week (virtual) course with 10 participants on each course. December – January 2021 - Work will be undertaken to scope options for future delivery.	Assistant Chief Executive
30	Although the Commission noted the review of the Council Tax Support scheme 18 months ago, we are concerned a) at the possibility of the arrangements leading to increased arrears as a result of Covid-19 and recommend special consideration be given to improving the	Within existing resources.	Annually - A statutory annual review of the Council Tax Support Scheme will be undertaken. December 2020 – Report to scrutiny on the Council Tax Support Scheme - support, spend and full resident analysis	Customer and Digital Services

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	<p>treatment of non-dependants; and b) that the council reviews its approach to the outsourced enforcement service for Council Tax debts, and carefully monitors its use of enforcement agents, as well as issuing sanctions if agents do not operate fairly.</p>		<p><i>(including the data for non-deps)</i>. Part of this will include the additional £150 given to working age residents who did not receive full council tax support. In some instances this could be because of non-dependent deductions. Like most areas, residents impacted by Covid have a special recovery code in Housing Benefit overpayments and council tax accounts to ensure residents are protected. The council also operates a 13A Council Tax Hardship payment scheme, which residents can apply for through the Resident Support fund.</p> <p>Autumn 2020 – the council is reviewing contracts with existing enforcement agents and contracting with Newham’s oneSource. Over the next 12 months</p>	

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			respective performance will be closely monitored.	
31	We recommend that the council should also consider whether court orders/liability orders are necessary in all cases of Council Tax arrears and, wherever possible, should exercise greater flexibility regarding payment plans and offers of repayment wherever possible, while discontinuing the practice of requiring immediate payment of a year's Council Tax immediately when arrears are encountered.	Within existing resources – see note above.	<p>Ongoing – existing policies are being reviewed ensuring that ethical, supportive collection is front and centre of policy and practice.</p> <p>March 2021 – Revised policies to Cabinet.</p> <p>Existing council practice is to seek agreement to pay with the customer. The council does not seek a liability order in all cases of council tax arrears, but only for debtors who do not make contact or refuse to agree a payment plan.</p>	Customer and Digital Services
32	We recommend that the council explores a further extension of the Hub model so that advice services are available at venues such as GP surgeries, and family wellbeing centres in order for people to have	Within existing resources. Funding for the Hub model is contained	Ongoing - There are 28 VCS organisations actively working through Hubs. Hubs were already operational in Foodbanks offering advice services (pre-	Customer and Digital Services

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	<p>their issues addressed in places that they already visit and trust.</p>	<p>within the Medium Term Financial Strategy.</p>	<p>Covid) and this will resume. The Hubs are the key contact within the council for referrals to foodbanks as well as providing a holistic assessment.</p> <p>The council is also working with GP Link Workers, for example supporting those with MH problems to tackle debt. The council has developed referral process for Link Workers to refer into Brent Community Hubs.</p> <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved pathways for residents between health and council services. • Social prescribing capacity provided to residents accessing community and family hubs. 	

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring opportunities for community led social prescribing in Church End and Alperton. <p>September – December 2020 - A review of the Hubs offer is undertaken to consider the future balance of face-to-face and phone services.</p>	
33	We commend the work being undertaken by Brent to work with its health partners in mitigating the impact of the current pandemic and recommend continuing partnership in tailoring localised health support to those areas most impacted.	Within existing resources.	<p>June 2020 and Ongoing – Early identification and self-isolation of cases of COVID is an important tool in reducing community transmission. The council has negotiated with the Department of Health and Social Care the introduction of local test centres. From 11 November a local test and trace was launched.</p> <p>July 2020 - The council has developed targeted communications including working with local community leaders to reinforce individual and household risk</p>	Community Wellbeing

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			<p>reduction strategies and to reinforce messages on early identification, testing and diagnosis.</p> <p>July 2020 - An Inequalities Working Subgroup of the Health and Wellbeing Board and a Strategic Oversight Group has been formed to drive work to reduce health inequalities in the short, medium and long-term.</p> <p>September 2020 – Initial meetings took place with communities in Alperton and Church End on 8 and 9 September. This engagement continues.</p> <p>October – November 2020 - Co-ordinators will be recruited to act as a focal point across partners and communities in Church End and Alperton.</p>	

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			<p>October – March 2021 – Regular community meetings.</p> <p>October – March 2021 – Multidisciplinary health team introduced to “take primary care to the people”.</p>	
34	<p>To help bring together the many strands of council activity concerned with child poverty, we recommend the council considers an overarching strategic objective to address child poverty with measurable outcomes that are regularly monitored, perhaps with a reporting line to Full Council.</p>	<p>Within existing resources.</p>	<p>All CYP activity works towards improving outcomes including tackling child poverty.</p> <p>January 2021 - An overarching strategic objective will be considered as part of the borough plan refresh process.</p> <p>Ongoing – Tackling child poverty will also continue to be included in the rolling programmes of strategy refreshes with a requirement to make it explicit.</p>	<p>CYP</p>
35	<p>We recommend that the council brings together a statutory-led “Youth and</p>	<p>Within existing resources.</p>	<p>October – December 2020 – Stakeholder engagement workshops.</p>	<p>CYP</p>

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	<p>Community Strategy for Young People” in Brent and develops an outreach model with the voluntary and community sector to engage with young people in addressing the impacts of poverty and social exclusion.</p>		<p>January- March 2021 – Development phase.</p> <p>March 2021 – Strategy agreed by council and community partners. Outreach model to support this in place.</p>	
36	<p>We recommend that the council, as a priority, works with partners to tackle fuel poverty in the Borough, alerting private landlords letting the most energy inefficient homes to the requirement to improve energy standards, using enforcement powers and taking advantage of government vouchers toward the cost, thereby reducing excess winter deaths following Covid-19 and other respiratory illnesses.</p>	<p>Within existing resources.</p>	<p>9 November 2020 – Draft Brent Climate Emergency Strategy 2021-2030 agreed by Cabinet for public consultation - The Strategy recognises that tackling energy inefficiency in homes can also help to reduce fuel poverty and ensure some of our most vulnerable residents are living in warm and comfortable homes.</p> <p>Headline vision – Theme 3 – Homes and Buildings – By 2030, as many homes and buildings in the borough as possible will be more energy efficient, be powered by renewable sources and be</p>	<p>Assistant Chief Executive/Community Wellbeing /Regeneration and Environment</p>

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			<p>resilient to future adverse weather events caused by climate change - and the council will do all in its gift to achieve an average rating of Energy Performance Certificate B in directly owned council stock.</p> <p>Warm homes: Ensuring that measures to reduce carbon emissions are affordable for vulnerable and low-income households is a key theme within the “working together” section of the strategy.</p> <p>October – March 2021 – Tackling fuel poverty will also be taken into account in the review of the Private Rented Sector (see housing workstream).</p>	
37	We recommend that the council supports the future sustainability of food aid agencies in the	Yes - This will have financial implications	January 2021 – A paper will be presented to CMT outlining specific	Assistant Chief Executive

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	borough including by further developing community garden schemes and working with food banks, mutual aid groups and residents' associations.		proposals, including assessment of the financial implications.	