

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>November 2020 and Ongoing - The council has agreed an additional £3M of</p>	<p>Customer and Digital Services</p>

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			<p>funding for the Resident Support Fund along with additional emergency support funding for the second lock down and winter period for both food and fuel. The capacity of the hubs service has been increased with three additional advisers appointed. The council will continue to keep capacity under review as well as to work with external hubs partners to ensure our services are able to respond to areas of need.</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>November 2020 - The council has started 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</p>	<p>Customer and Digital Services</p>

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			<p>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>	
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.	January – February 2021 - Work will be undertaken to scope options for future delivery.	Assistant Chief Executive

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30	<p>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 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>Within existing resources.</p>	<p>Annually - A statutory annual review of the Council Tax Support Scheme will be undertaken.</p> <p>December – March 2021 – The council’s overall debt policy is under review.</p> <p>Ongoing – Performance of enforcement agents will continue to be closely monitored.</p>	<p>Customer and Digital Services</p>
31	<p>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</p>	<p>Within existing resources – see note above.</p>	<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 presented to Cabinet.</p>	<p>Customer and Digital Services</p>

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	year's Council Tax immediately when arrears are encountered.		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.	
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 their issues addressed in places that they already visit and trust.	Within existing resources. Funding for the Hub model is contained within the Medium Term Financial Strategy.	<p>Ongoing - There are 28 VCS organisations actively working through hubs.</p> <p>The council is continuing with plans to offer hubs services in a wider range of locations, for example food banks. It is also looking at how best to align the services provided by hubs with the services being provided by the new FWCs. It is also working with GP link workers and social prescribers to ensure referrals can be made to wider hub services.</p>	Customer and Digital Services

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33	<p>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.</p>	<p>Within existing resources.</p>	<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 service was launched.</p> <p>July 2020 and Ongoing - The council has developed targeted communications including working with local community leaders to reinforce individual and household risk 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</p>	<p>Community Wellbeing</p>

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			<p>has been formed to drive work to reduce health inequalities in the short, medium and long-term.</p> <p>September – October 2020 – Initial meetings took place with communities in Alperton and Church End on 8 and 9 September. This engagement continues.</p> <p>November – March 2021 – Regular community meetings.</p> <p>November – 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</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>CYP</p>

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	are regularly monitored, perhaps with a reporting line to Full Council.		Ongoing – Tackling child poverty will also continue to be included in the rolling programmes of strategy refreshes with a requirement to make it explicit.	
35	We recommend that the council brings together a statutory-led “Youth and 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.	Within existing resources.	October – December 2020 – Stakeholder engagement workshops undertaken. January- March 2021 – Development phase. March 2021 – Strategy agreed by council and community partners. Outreach model to support this in place.	CYP
36	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	Within existing resources.	9 November 2020 – Draft 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	Assistant Chief Executive/Community Wellbeing /Regeneration and Environment

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	<p>cost, thereby reducing excess winter deaths following Covid-19 and other respiratory illnesses.</p>		<p>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 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</p>	

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			<p>“working together” section of the strategy.</p> <p>December 2020 – May 2021 – Tackling fuel poverty will also be taken into account in the review of the Private Rented Sector (see Housing workstream).</p>	
37	<p>We recommend that the council supports the future sustainability of food aid agencies in the borough including by further developing community garden schemes and working with food banks, mutual aid groups and residents’ associations.</p>	<p>Yes - This will have financial implications</p>	<p>January – March 2021 – A paper will be presented to CMT outlining specific proposals, including assessment of the financial implications.</p>	<p>Assistant Chief Executive</p>