

BOROUGH OF TELFORD & WREKIN

CABINET – 8 NOVEMBER 2012

TELFORD AND WREKIN CRISIS HELP NETWORK

REPORT OF THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

LEAD CABINET MEMBER – COUNCILLOR SHAUN DAVIES

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 Today there are people across the UK who are struggling to cope with the cost of living and supporting themselves and their families. Redundancy, homelessness, illness, domestic violence, debt, family breakdown and paying for rising fuel and food costs are just some of the reasons why some people are in crisis.
- 1.2 This problem is expected to bring increased pressures with the impending changes to welfare benefits that will take effect from April 2013. Nationally, this has resulted in a number of local authorities preparing to invest in charity-run food banks and other support mechanisms, to cope with increasing demand for crisis help.
- 1.3 Until recently, emergency response in Telford and Wrekin had been delivered by individual organisations at the point of need, providing shelter and/or food and other basic essentials for people to live. However, it had not been co-ordinated and it had become increasingly difficult to meet rising demand.
- 1.4 In response, a number of local service providers have come together to agree how they can work together more effectively. This has resulted in Telford and Wrekin Crisis Help Network being established to provide a co-ordinated crisis response for people living in the borough. This work has also become a project in the Co-operative Council Work Programme.
- 1.5 Network members cover all sectors – private, voluntary and public – and currently consist of the KIP- in Place (KIP) Project in Wellington, Maninplace, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), Telford Christian Council, Dawley Christian Centre, British Red Cross, Wrekin Housing Trust (WHT), Lyreco, King Street Cafe in Wellington and the Council. The lead organisation is Telford & Wrekin Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB).
- 1.6 Within the Network there is a wealth of experience and understanding of the complex needs of individuals and families in acute financial crisis. Network agencies already provide a range of established and respected services including emergency food, emergency shelter, temporary accommodation and advice and support to resolve financial crises.

- 1.7 The Network's overall vision is that '*No one in the borough of Telford and Wrekin should need to go without the basic essentials to keep themselves and their families sheltered, fed, clean, clothed, warm and healthy*'.
- 1.8 By using a 'mixed economy' approach, the Network has developed a business plan and associated costs for implementing a co-ordinated, cost effective and efficient crisis provision for the people of Telford and Wrekin.
- 1.9 The Network recognises that this will form an essential part of the Council's plans for crisis support, following the transfer of crisis loans from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and changes to the Council Tax Benefits from April 2013. As this will require a great deal of work within a tight timescale, it has been agreed to work in phases, on a priority basis.
- 1.10 To begin with, the Network needs to employ a project co-ordinator to drive the project, the first priority being to open a central food depot and distribution system by the end of December 2012. It has been agreed that this post will be recruited and managed by Telford CAB.
- 1.11 To deliver the project an appropriate level of sustainable funding is required. The Council is one of a number of partners who are proposing to contribute to this, along with regular donations of food etc from local people, fundraising activities and bids for external funding, some of which have already been applied for.
- 1.12 As part of the Council's own social responsibilities, we will be encouraging employees to make voluntary donations of non-perishable food items, starting in October, to support the project.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That Cabinet notes the progress being made to develop a suitable crisis provision for people living in the borough, and;**
- 2.2 **That Cabinet approves the Council's proposed funding to support the project, as described in Section 4.**

3. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 3.1 All Network agencies have reported increased demand over the last 2 years, for help from clients with immediate need for shelter and/or food and other basic essentials. For example, in the first quarter of 2012/13, Telford CAB dealt with 67 enquiries from people in acute financial crisis, providing 36 food parcels in addition to advice and support to resolve the issues.
- 3.2 Comparing the first quarter of 2012/13 to the same quarter in 2011/12, Telford CAB reported a 114% increase in clients presenting themselves as homeless and an 80% increase in clients threatened with homelessness. The same period also showed a 171% increase in enquiries about crisis loans and 133% about budgeting loans.

- 3.3 National statistics show that there were 7, 700 applications for crisis loans and community care grants from people in Telford in 2010/11, and 3,150 in the first half of 2011/12.
- 3.4 This increase is mostly due to reductions and changes in the welfare benefits system, starting with the phased transition from Incapacity Benefit to Employment Support Allowance in 2010.
- 3.5 In this process, many ill and disabled people found their benefit stopped due to poor work capability assessments or lack of understanding of the requirement to attend the assessment. Others found that the assessment deemed them fit for work and Employment Support Allowance was stopped, but the Job Centre deemed them not fit to work and therefore not eligible for Job Seekers Allowance, leaving them without any income at all. These issues particularly affected people with mental health issues.
- 3.6 With further changes yet to come we are now in a situation where many organisations and local authorities up and down the country are preparing to increase crisis support, for example, the opening of Foodbanks.
- 3.7 Foodbanks are non-profit, charitable organisations that provide emergency food parcels, advice and support to help people get their lives back on track. The food and other essential items are donated by the public and sorted/distributed by volunteers. Research shows that Foodbanks have a positive impact on local communities as they can help prevent crime, housing loss, family breakdown and mental health problems.
- 3.8 Telford and Wrekin Crisis Network have considered the options and looked at local need. It has been agreed that rather than setting up a separate Foodbank, it would be more effective to work co-operatively, better utilising existing resources.
- 3.9 People are already aware of local service providers that are well established across the borough, and are well used. By opening a central depot, increased provisions could be accommodated, to support these services. Items such as food, furniture, clothing, and baby products could be stored and distributed as and when required.

4. FUNDING PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Back in July, Cabinet approved the inclusion of the Foodbank project in the Co-operative Council work programme, recognising the important role the Council could play in supporting crisis provision across the borough.
- 4.2 At the time, the Council proposed to allocate up to £5,000, as a one-off contribution, towards the costs of developing this project. Overall costs have now been estimated at around £85,200.
- 4.3 Due to the tight timescales we are working to, we are now seeking approval to commit the Council's £5,000 originally proposed for the project. The funds have been identified from the Co-operative Council budget.

- 4.4 It has been confirmed that Telford CAB will administer the project, including financial management and monitoring arrangements. It will be the responsibility of Telford CAB to report back to the Network on a regular basis, regarding all financial matters.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Community Impact	Yes	Homelessness, debt, food and fuel poverty are all increasing and the impact is evident across the borough, particularly amongst young people, migrant workers, people with mental health issues and families on low incomes. Research shows that Foodbanks have a positive impact on local communities as they can help prevent crime, housing loss, family breakdown and mental health problems.
Financial & Value for Money Impact	Yes	<p>The financial contribution towards the Crisis Help Network is £5,000. This will be funded from the Cooperative Council budget which was created to pump prime community projects.</p> <p>The estimated costs for the whole project are £85,200 and a funding shortfall is currently projected. Further contributions are actively being sought from other partners, external funding bids, donations and future fund raising activities. Some of the costs are likely to be offset by in-kind support and all parties are clear that the Council's contribution is a cash limited one-off sum to help 'pump prime' the project.</p> <p>As mentioned in paragraph 4.4 above, CAB will have responsibility for financial management and monitoring arrangements.</p> <p>In relation to operating costs, charities are currently granted mandatory NNDR relief of 80% and can apply for 20% top-up relief which is awarded on a discretionary basis by the Council. The Council has to fund 75% of any discretionary relief granted.</p>
Legal Issues	Yes	<p>The General Power of Competence under the Localism Act 2011 provides that councils are specifically empowered to do anything not prohibited by legislation and subject to public law principles and due process.</p> <p>Legal Services advice will be obtained as necessary and any appropriate contract documentation put in</p>

		place to protect the Council's interests.
Other impacts, risks and opportunities	Yes	The ongoing programme of work will be evaluated by the Project Co-ordinator to ensure risks are identified and managed and any associated opportunities are maximised.
Environmental	Yes	The project should result in a reduction of food waste and an increase in the recycling of furniture and clothing.
Impact on specific wards	Yes	Borough-wide impact

6. PREVIOUS MINUTES

6.1 Minute number CB25 - 26 July 2012

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.

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