

#### **FC47. Tackling Poverty in Falkirk - Additional Support to Low-income Households**

Council considered a report from the Chief Executive which provided an update on work which had progressed to provide additional support to low-income households in line with the decision of the Executive at its meeting of 21 June 2022. The work in the report supported the Council Plan priorities of promoting opportunities and educational attainment and reducing inequalities.

The report provided information on action taken to date. This included:-

- Household support fund re-launched at the start of September 2022.
- Free swimming for GoCard holders which was introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022.
- Poverty awareness training was provided to 133 staff during Challenge Poverty week to increase understand of poverty and the support available. A further session was held with the Council's senior leadership team to increase their understanding of poverty and consider how they could tackle poverty within their own services.
- Leaflets, posters and a webpage detailing support to help with increasing cost of living had been developed.
- A campaign was carried out over the summer to promote pension credit to the residents of the high flats.
- Promoted the advice and support services to parents and carers via schools.
- Advice and Support Hub teams worked with services and communities to reach out to existing support groups to raise awareness of the support that they could provide.
- Carried out a short engagement to gather views on 'warm banks' which would operate from libraries.
- Provided pre-employment support to 150 unemployed parents since March 2022.
- Continued work to develop and expand the Community Link Work Programme across the Falkirk area.

Further action which was planned included:-

- Local Authority Covid Economic Recovery payments of £75 would be offered to each household in receipt Council tax Reduction by 31 January 2023.
- Align free school meal payments during school holidays with national criteria
- Implementation of Council wi-fi at all libraries. This means that there will be consistent connectivity for Council provided devices, such as Council laptops and the iPads provided to children and young people through the Connected Falkirk programme.
- Offer monthly Think Poverty sessions to staff across the Council and include in induction for new staff.
- Offer GoCard holders a free tea or coffee until the end of February 2023.

- Work on an alternative concession card scheme for those on income related benefits was being carried out in line with a wider pricing review.

Demand for support from the second phase of the household support fund had exceeded expectations. There was £190k available from the funding previously provided by the Scottish Government to support people experiencing financial insecurity. It was proposed to add this funding to the budget for the household support fund to maximise support to people over winter.

Councillor Meiklejohn, seconded by Councillor Collie, moved that Council:-

- (1) notes the action already undertaken;
- (2) agrees the plans for further action;
- (3) agrees the proposal to add a further £190k to the Household Support Fund, and
- (4) agrees that free school meal and bridging payments would continue at current funding levels for December 2022 and revert to Scottish Government eligibility criteria for the remainder of the financial year.

As an amendment, Councillor Hannah, seconded by Councillor Nimmo, moved the terms of the motion subject to the following alteration to clause (4) and insertion of additional clauses as below:-

- (4) agrees that free school meal and bridging payments will continue at current funding levels for the remainder of the financial year;
- (5) recognises the value of the work that a range of officers have undertaken and approves of the approach of ensuring that all staff in all services understand the importance of addressing poverty issues;
- (6) thanks staff in Advice Services across Falkirk for delivering over £13 million in financial gain to people across the Falkirk Council area – 13 times the cost of the services;
- (7) asks officers to provide a report to Council on the ways in which the Advice Services across Falkirk could work with Education and Health and Social Care Services to undertake income maximisation campaigns throughout 2023/2024 to promote take up of benefits related to disability physical and mental health problems (as well as low income) by all age groups, and
- (8) asks officers to provide a report to council on the local economy multiplier – estimating the benefits to the local economy of increased incomes from benefits spent in the local economy.

Councillor Bundy gave notice of a further amendment.

Council adjourned at 11.35am and reconvened at 12noon with all members present as per the sederunt.

In terms of Standing order 22.1, the vote was taken by roll call, there being 28 members present with voting as undernoted:-

For the motion (16) – Depute Provost Balfour and Councillors Binnie, Bouse, Bundy, Collie, Deakin, Devine, Flynn, Forrest, Garner, Kerr, Meiklejohn, Murtagh, Patrick, Robertson and Sinclair.

For the amendment (12) – Provost Bissett and Councillors Aitchison, Anslow, Hannah, Kelly, McCabe, Nimmo, Paterson, Redmond, Ritchie, Spears and Stainbank.

The motion was carried and became the substantive motion against which the further amendment was considered.

As a further amendment, Councillor Bundy, seconded by Councillor Kerr, moved the terms of the motion subject to the replacement of clause (4) with the following:-

- (4) agrees that free school meal and bridging payments will continue at current funding levels for December 2022 and revert to Scottish Government eligibility criteria for the remainder of the financial year and asks officers to explore collaborating with the Soil Association Scotland on their Food for Life programme to provide food to our young people meeting the standards of the programme and supporting better outcomes for health, our economy and the environment; and to report back to a future meeting of the Education, Children and Young People Executive.

Councillor Meiklejohn, with the consent of the Provost, and Councillor Collie as her seconder, agreed to adjust the terms of the motion to incorporate the terms of the further amendment. Having incorporated that terms of the further amendment into the motion the further amendment accordingly fell.

## **Decision**

### **Council:-**

- (1) noted the action already undertaken;**
- (2) agreed the plans for further action;**
- (3) agreed the proposal to add a further £190k to the Household Support Fund, and**
- (4) agreed that free school meal and bridging payments would continue at current funding levels for December 2022 and revert to Scottish Government eligibility criteria for the remainder of the financial year and asked officers to explore collaborating with the Soil Association Scotland on their Food for Life programme to provide food to our young people meeting the standards of the**

**programme and supporting better outcomes for health, our economy and the environment; and to report back to a future meeting of the Education Children and Young People Executive.**