

**To: Deputy Leader and Members of the Resources Board
Councillors D Wright, Davis, N Dirveiks, Gosling,
Henney, Morson, Moss, Simpson, Symonds and
Waters**

For the information of other Members of the Council

For general enquiries please contact Democratic Services on 01827 719221 or via email – democraticservices@northwarks.gov.

For enquiries about specific reports please contact the Officer named in the reports.

This document can be made available in large print and electronic accessible formats if requested.

RESOURCES BOARD AGENDA

25 March 2019

The Resources Board will meet in the Committee Room at The Council House, South Street, Atherstone, Warwickshire on Monday, 25 March 2019 at 7pm.

AGENDA

- 1 Evacuation Procedure.**
- 2 Apologies for Absence / Members away on official Council business.**
- 3 Disclosable Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests.**

4 **Minutes of the Resources Board held on 28 January 2019** – copy herewith, to be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 **Public Participation**

Up to twenty minutes will be set aside for members of the public to put questions to elected Members. Questions should be submitted by 9.30am two working days prior to the meeting. Participants are restricted to five minutes each. If you wish to put a question to the meeting please contact Amanda Tonks or Emma Humphreys on 01827 719221 or email democraticservices@northwarks.gov.uk.

**ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND DECISION
(WHITE PAPERS)**

6 **Internal Audit Plan 2019/20 and Counter Fraud Activity** – Report of the Corporate Director - Resources

Summary

The purpose of this report is to set out the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2019/20 and update Board Members on the work of the Counter Fraud Officer.

The Contact Officer for this report is Linda Downes (719416).

7 **Financial Inclusion Update** – Report of the Corporate Director - Community

Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update of the Financial Inclusion activity undertaken by the Council, both individually but mainly alongside partners that has been delivered under the North Warwickshire Community Partnership “Tackling Poverty” commitment over the last twelve months.

The Contact Officer for this report is Bob Trahern (719378).

8 Exclusion of the Public and Press

Recommendation:

That under Section 110A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business, on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by Schedule 12A to the Act.

**EXEMPT INFORMATION
(GOLD PAPERS)**

9 Irrecoverable Local Taxation Debts – Report of the Corporate Director – Community

The Contact Officer for this report is Bob Trahern (719378).

10 Community Support Service Delivery – Report of the Director of Housing

The Contact Officer for this report is Angela Coates (719369).

11 Condition of Council Properties – Report of the Director of Housing

The Contact Officer for this report is Angela Coates (719369).

12 Condition of Council Properties – Report of the Director of Housing

The Contact Officer for this report is Angela Coates (719369).

13 Land Issues – Further Update – Report of the Director of Streetscape

The Contact Officer for this report is Richard Dobbs (719440)

**JERRY HUTCHINSON
Chief Executive**

NORTH WARWICKSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES BOARD

28 January 2019

Present: Councillor D Wright in the Chair

Councillors N Dirveiks, Gosling, Moss, Phillips, Simpson and Symonds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Henney (substitute Councillor Phillips) and Waters.

Councillors Bell, Clews and D Humphreys were also in attendance.

42 **Disclosable Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests**

None were declared at the meeting.

43 **Minutes of the Resources Board meeting held on 12 November 2018**

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 12 November 2018, copies having previously been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

44 **Corporate Plan 2019-20**

The Chief Executive sought the Board's approval for the Corporate Plan Targets for which it was responsible and the 2019-20 Service Plans for the Housing, Finance and Human Resources, Community Services and Corporate Services Divisions

Recommendation to the Executive Board:

- a **That those Corporate Plan Targets as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Chief Executive, for which the Board is responsible, be agreed; and**
- b **That those elements of the Service Plans that are the responsibility of the Resources Board, as set out in Appendix B to the report of the Chief Executive, be agreed.**

45 Information and Communications Technology Strategy 2019-2023

The Director of Corporate Services presented the Draft Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Strategy for 2019-2023 to Members for their consideration and comment.

Resolved:

- a That the Draft Information and Communications Technology Strategy 2019 – 2023, attached as Appendix A to the report of the Director of Corporate Services, be deferred; and**
- b That a Task and Finish Group be formed to consider the Draft Strategy.**

46 Broadband Update Report

The Director of Corporate Services provided an update on the progress made so far and the future plans to improve broadband coverage and speeds in the Borough.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

47 Adoption of the Discretionary Retail Rate Relief Policy

The Corporate Director – Community asked Members to adopt the revised Non Domestic Discretionary Retail Rate Relief guidelines attached as Appendix A to his report.

Resolved:

That the Non Domestic Rate Relief Scheme, attached as Appendix A to the report of the Corporate Director – Community, be adopted.

48 General Fund Fees and Charges

The Corporate Director – Environment, Director of Streetscape, Corporate Director – Community Services and Director of Housing reported on the fees and charges for 2018/19 and the proposed fees and charges for 2019/20.

Resolved:

That the schedule of fees and charges for 2019/20, as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Corporate Director – Environment, Director of Streetscape, Corporate Director – Community Services and Director of Housing be approved.

49 General Fund Revenue Estimates 2019/20 – Services Recharged Across All Boards

The Corporate Director – Resources reported on the revised budget for 2018/19 and gave an estimate of expenditure for 2019/20, together with forward commitments for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Resolved:

a That the revised budget for 2018/19 be accepted; and

Recommendation to the Executive Board:

b That the Estimates of Expenditure for 2019/20, as submitted in the report of the Corporate Director - Resources, be included in the budget to be brought before the meeting of the Executive Board on 11 February 2019.

50 General Fund Revenue Estimates 2019/20 – Services Remaining within the Board

The Corporate Director - Resources reported on the revised budget for 2018/19 and gave an estimate of expenditure for 2019/20, together with forward commitments for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Resolved:

a That the revised budget for 2018/19 be accepted;

Recommendation to the Executive Board:

b That the Estimates of Expenditure for 2019/20, as submitted in the report of the Corporate Director – Resources, be included in the budget to be brought before the meeting of the Executive Board on 11 February 2019.

51 General Fund Revenue Estimates 2019/20 - Summary

The Corporate Director - Resources reported on the revised budget for 2018/19 and gave an estimate of expenditure for 2019/20, together with forward commitments for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Recommendation to Executive Board:

That the following items be recommended to the Executive Board for consideration in setting the Council Tax of the Borough Council:

- a The revised budget for 2018/19; and**
- b The schedule of expenditure requirements totalling £8,823,280 for 2019/2020.**

52 Housing Revenue Account Estimates 2019/20 and Rent Review

The Corporate Director - Resources reported on the revised budget for 2018/19 and gave an estimate of expenditure for 2019/20, together with forward commitments for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Resolved:

- a That the revised estimates for 2018/19 be accepted;**
- b That rent decreases of 1%, as required by the Government, be adopted;**
- c That the proposed fees and charges for 2019/20, as set out in Appendix D to the report of the Corporate Director - Resources, be approved;**
- d That the service charges for the cleaning of communal areas, as detailed in Appendix E to the report of the Corporate Director - Resources, be approved from April 2019;**
- e That the service charges for window cleaning, as detailed in Appendix F to the report of the Corporate Director - Resources, be approved from April 2019;**
- f That the growth of £14,070 for new software, to assist rent debt collection following the introduction of universal credit, be approved; and**

- g That the Estimates of Expenditure for 2019/20, as submitted, be approved.**

53 Borough Care Equipment Upgrade

The Director of Housing informed the Board about the recent audit of Borough Care, conducted by the Telecare Services Association, and provided Members with information about the change over from analogue to digital lifeline equipment and implications for the Council's service.

Resolved:

- a That the continued accreditation of the Borough Care Service by the Telecare Services Association be noted;**
- b That the upgrade of the Borough Care control centre equipment, to ensure compatibility with the new UK digital public telephone network, be approved; and**
- c That the programme of replacing analogue lifeline alarms be subject to a further report to the Board and if, in the meantime, a customer requires a digital alarm the change will be sustained at the same level as other customers.**

54 Capital Programme 2018/19 to 2021/22

The Corporate Director - Resources identified changes to the Council's 2018/19 capital programme and detailed proposals for schemes to be included within the Council's capital programme over the next three years.

Recommendation to the Executive Board:

- a That the changes to the 2018/19 revised capital programme be approved;**
- b That the schemes shown in Appendix A to the report of the Corporate Director - Resources, previously approved within the Council's three-year capital programme, including any 2021/22 additions relating to previously approved schemes be approved;**
- c That the growth bid included within the 2020/21 capital programme be approved;**
- d That the schemes which will not be included within the capital programme, as shown in Appendix B to the report of the Corporate Director - Resources, be noted; and**

- e **That the proposed vehicle replacement schedule, as shown in Appendix C to the report of the Corporate Director - Resources, be approved.**

55 Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy for 2019/20

The Corporate Director – Resources outlined the Treasury Management Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement and Investment Strategy for 2019/20.

Resolved:

That the proposed strategies for 2019/20 be approved.

56 Progress Report on Achievement of Corporate Plan and Performance Indicator Targets April – December 2018

The Chief Executive informed Members of the progress with the achievement of the Corporate Plan and Performance Indicator targets relevant to the Board for April to December 2018.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

D Wright
Chairman

Agenda Item No 6

Resources Board

25 March 2019

**Report of the
Corporate Director - Resources**

**Internal Audit Plan 2019/20 and
Counter Fraud Activity**

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2019/20 and update Board Members on the work of the Counter Fraud Officer.

Recommendation to the Board

That the Internal Audit Plan at Appendix A be approved, and that the work of the Counter Fraud Officer be noted.

2. Internal Audit Plan

- 2.1 The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) require an annual internal audit plan to be developed using a risk based assessment process. The assessment process at North Warwickshire Borough Council considers factors such as:-
- The extent of change and development;
 - Staffing issues, e.g. potential inadequate training, high vacancy levels or extensive delegation;
 - The complexity of the system;
 - Previous audit reports/agreed action plans and the length of time since the last review;
 - Frauds detected or investigated;
 - The sensitivity of the system, for example the impact to the authority of something going wrong; and
 - The value and volume of transactions.

- 2.2 From the assessment, a risk score is allocated to each system, which is then used to prioritise audits and determine the frequency of each review. Scores of 100 or below are deemed to be too low a risk to warrant a review; 101 to 200 are medium risk, which require a review every 3 to 5 years and scores of 201 or more are high risk and will be reviewed at least once every 2 years. On completion of each review the assessment will be updated to ensure that it remains reasonable and is based on sound judgement.
- 2.3 There are some high profile areas such as procurement (contract management) and leisure services that require an annual review. Also for the key financial systems there is a three year rolling programme in place which is reflective of the high value and volume of transactions within each system.
- 2.4 The proposed plan is at Appendix A to this report; the table includes the risk score established from the risk assessment process described above. The table also gives an indication of when the work is likely to be completed, although there has to be some flexibility in this as some reviews will run over from one quarter to the next at times for various reasons. In determining the timing of the reviews consideration has been given to the risk score to ensure that the higher risk areas are completed first, unless there are any specific reasons for completing the work later in the year, such as work pressures.
- 2.5 Follow-up reviews are completed 6 to 12 months after the final audit report has been issued to ensure that all agreed actions have been addressed as planned.

3 Counter Fraud Activity

- 3.1 The current Counter Fraud Officer has been employed by the Council since June 2018, this is a shared role with Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council (NBBC), the Officer spends 40% of his time investigating fraud allegations at NWBC and 60% at NBBC.
- 3.2 So far this year, at NWBC the Officer has identified cashable savings to the Public Purse of approximately £52,000 and notional savings of approximately £14,000. Notional savings are the estimated future savings to the public purse as a result of the intervention and successful fraud investigation. For example, it is assumed that had it not been for the investigation a housing benefit claim would have continued to be paid at the higher rate for at least 21 weeks. The notional saving calculations are in line with those used by the Cabinet Office for their data matching exercise, the National Fraud Initiative, which is conducted to assist in the prevention and detection of fraud with data being provided by some 1,200 organisations from both the public and private sectors, NWBC being one of them.

3.3 The successful cases during 2018/19 have mainly been in relation to Housing Benefit and Council Tax fraud. However, there are plans to look at other types of fraud during 2019/20 such as tenancy fraud through sub-letting or abandonment of the property. The notional savings to the public purse for this type of fraud can be £93,000 per property recovered based on an average four year fraudulent tenancy.

4 Report Implications and Links to Council Priorities

4.1 Risk Management Implications

4.1.1 The Audit Plan for 2019/20 takes specific account of the Council's strategic and operational risks.

4.2 Links to Council's Priorities

4.2.1 The Audit Plan for 2019/20 is based on a risk assessment which will ensure the best use of resources to provide a high-quality service.

The Contact Officer for this report is Linda Downes (719416).

Background Papers

Background Paper No	Author	Nature of Background Paper	Date

Appendix A

Internal Audit Plan 2019/20

	Risk Score	Timing of the Review *
System Reviews		
Affordable Housing Development Programme	145 - medium	Quarter 1
Capital Project Management	176 - medium	Quarter 1
Cesspool Emptying Services	116 - medium	Quarter 4
Cleaning – Amenity Cleaning (streets, public areas, fly tipping)	179 - medium	Quarter 1
Civic Silver and Security	122 - medium	Quarter 3
Community Centres	124 - medium	Quarter 3
Corporate Feedback (Compliments and Complaints)	129 - medium	Quarter 3
Corporate Governance	113 - medium	Quarter 4
Economic Development	139 - medium	Quarter 3
Environmental Protection	137 - medium	Quarter 3
Equality	140 - medium	Quarter 2
Events and Publicity	132 - medium	Quarter 3
Housing Voids	216 - high	Quarter 1
Partnerships and Shared Services	132 - medium	Quarter 3
Refuse Collection (domestic only)	185 - medium	Quarter 1
Stores	114 - medium	Quarter 4
Transport	140 - medium	Quarter 2
Annual Reviews		
Procurement	N/A	Quarter 4
Leisure Services (scope to be agreed)	N/A	Quarter 4
Key Financial Audits		
Council Tax including Local Council Tax Support	N/A	Quarter 2
Creditors	N/A	Quarter 2
Payroll	N/A	Quarter 2
Rental Income	N/A	Quarter 2
Follow-up Reviews		
Anti Social Behaviour/ Crime and Disorder	156 - medium	Quarter 3
CCTV	194 - medium	Quarter 2
Flexi time/Home Working/Attendance Management/Lone Working	204 - high	Quarter 4
FOI/EIR/SAR	177 - medium	Quarter 1
Gifts and Hospitality	141 - medium	Quarter 2

Health and Safety (inc. Asbestos Management)	153 - medium	Quarter 1
Houses in Multiple Occupation	124 - medium	Quarter 1
Leisure Services Promotional Events and Activities	208 - high	Quarter 3
Licensing	163 - medium	Quarter 3
Maintenance Trees, Walls and Fences	145 - medium	Quarter 4
Pest Control	107 - medium	Quarter 4
Petty Cash	122 - medium	Quarter 2
Development Control	166 - medium	Quarter 3
Refuse Collection (Trade and Bulky)	158 -medium	Quarter 3
Safeguarding	147 - medium	Quarter 4

- * Timing of the Review –
- Quarter 1 – April to June 2019
 - Quarter 2 – July to September 2019
 - Quarter 3 – October to December 2019
 - Quarter 4 – January to March 2020

Agenda Item No 7

Resources Board

25 March 2019

**Report of the Corporate Director -
Community**

Financial Inclusion Update

1 Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update of the Financial Inclusion activity undertaken by the Council, both individually but mainly alongside partners that has been delivered under the North Warwickshire Community Partnership "Tackling Poverty" commitment over the last twelve months.
- 1.2 The report summarises the key achievements and ongoing challenges faced by the Council and its residents during a year when we have continued to support the most significant welfare reforms in sixty years. The supported appendices provide greater detail on these and expand on our approach which is focussed on assisting residents in debt, suggesting ways of maximising their income, providing emergency help via food support as well as promoting health and well-being.
- 1.3 The real positives of the work outlined continues to show that despite significant financial challenges, the Council continue to lead the way both countywide and in some circumstances Nationally in working with partners to implement initiatives that are supporting people into or nearer work and helping them meet their financial obligations despite current budget constraints .

Recommendation to the Board

That the report be noted.

2 Background

- 2.1 For many years, the Council working with key local partners have been recognised for delivering proactive help and support to customers to ensure they have maximised their benefits entitlement and have been able to access debt and other advice when experiencing financial difficulty or personal problems. This has delivered on our corporate commitment of "Helping Others, Help Themselves".

2.2 It is very pleasing to report that despite the considerable and ongoing challenges being faced by the Council, its partners and its residents during 2018 that this commitment and approach continues to deliver very positive results helping the Council achieve excellent collection rates in respect of Council Tax and Rent as well as outcomes that have again been recognised Nationally as being both innovative and ground breaking as acknowledged by our peers, awarding bodies and Government agencies.

3 Key Achievements and Challenges in 2018

3.1 A summary of the current challenges facing the Council and headline successes achieved are outlined in the Community Services Division service plan on pages 2 to 4 as attached at Appendix A.

3.2 Throughout the year, detailed reports providing information on all relevant activities undertaken in the Borough in delivering its commitments are reviewed by the North Warwickshire Community Partnership under the theme "Tackling Poverty" for which the Corporate Director (Community) is the lead officer. These meet quarterly and are chaired by Councillor Colin Hayfield.

3.3 An example of the most recent update considered in December 2018 is attached at Appendix B. These updates summarise progress on the wide-ranging initiatives being undertaken and in the December report included a breakdown of the collection performance levels and arrears due to the Council which although very positive outlines the significant ongoing and future challenges to maintain this level of performance and activity.

3.4 The delivery of high and National upper quartile performance levels in the processing of benefits claims, both for new claims and change of circumstances contribute to this very positive position meaning that customers on low incomes are being assisted to receive the right level of support promptly. However, it should be noted that maintaining this position is becoming evermore difficult to maintain as we lose control over key parts of the application process as part of the migration of customers onto Universal Credit from existing legacy benefits. In addition, we are increasingly facing more situations where customers "can't, as opposed to "won't" pay monies due because of wider economic and health factors.

3.5 As National issues, these challenges and their impact locally is regularly reviewed by the Northern Warwickshire Financial Inclusion Partnership. This is an operational group of public, private and third sector partners coordinated via our shared management arrangements with Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council (NBBC). This group aims to monitor, agree, develop and deliver joined up solutions alongside consistent messaging as well as helping better understand the future demands on our front line customer service teams going forward.

3.6 Indications that the tailored approach we have adopted is working are not only demonstrated by the performance levels and positive outcomes being achieved but also the recognition that the work we are undertaking is receiving externally that continues to enhance the Councils reputation

3.7 In 2018, the Council most notably with its partner, the Healthy Living Network were made a finalist in seven National Award categories

- In March 2018, the Ediblelinks project was shortlisted for two Local Government Chronicle Awards in the categories; "Best Public/Private Partnership" which it won and "Best Innovation" in which it was Highly Commended.
- In May 2018, the project also won the "Best Partnership in the Community" at the Global Good Awards and the "Best Innovation Category" at the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation awards in October 2018.

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The work of the Ediblelinks project delivered in partnership with the Healthy Living Network and Ocado continues to exceed expectations delivering increasingly positive outcomes around financial help, promotion of health and well-being and community cohesion. Attached at Appendix C is the latest submission made in February 2019 to the Municipal Journal awards in the category "Delivering Better Outcomes". This submission best summarises the work of this ground breaking project in 2018 as well as its success in securing nearly £650,000 external funding for its food related and health and wellbeing activities that will help make it sustainable for the next 3 years.

- The Council also were Highly Commended in the categories, "Excellence in Social Inclusion" recognising the work of the Financial Inclusion Partnership as well as the "Excellence in Non Domestic Rates" recognising its in year recovery of 99.91% of monies due, the second highest collection rate in the Country.

3.8 In addition to external awards, in December 2018, the work of the Council featured as one of eleven Local Government National best practice case studies in a Money Advice Service publication "Supportive Council Tax Recovery". This recognised the very positive outcomes being achieved from our holistic approach to collecting debt corporately which seek to help address customer problems. The case study is attached at Appendix D and highlights how our "on line intuitive Customer Referral Form (CRF) developed in house is enabling key customer data on an individual's finances and needs to be collected and shared across the Council and its partners to better support and engage customers. This form is currently being rolled out countywide and is increasingly becoming a vital tool in ensuring customers requiring help and advice are engaging.

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- 3.9 In 2018, 1284 CRF were completed by a combination of individuals, Council Officers or approved agencies. The breakdown of these applications is monitored to review outcomes and ensure those seeking help beyond their immediate crisis (currently around 18% of forms completed) are engaging to address their circumstances.
- 3.10 The roll out and support of Universal Credit to all new benefit customers was fully implemented in September 2018 when the Atherstone jobcentre went live. Since this date, Council staff have been supporting impacted customers where required with assisted digital and personal budgeting support. To date, targets set the DWP on which rewards are paid have been exceeded and our approach has ensured the transition for the majority of customers has been managed effectively. However, the funding and responsibility for undertaking this role will transfer to the Citizens Advice service in April 2019 as part of a National commissioning exercise.
- 3.11 At this time, it remains unclear how this new arrangement will work in practice but the position will be continually monitored to minimise its impact on Rent, Housing Benefit Overpayment and Council Tax collection levels which are already being adversely impacted and also to ensure take up of Council Tax Support is maximised as this now involves making what was a one stage application process into two.
- 3.12 In addition, the implementation of ongoing welfare changes and managing the impact of increased homelessness responsibilities has resulted in additional workload and significantly greater joint working with Housing colleagues being necessary. This is because we are increasingly working with the same customers in respect of a growing number of debtors who owe significant levels of Housing Rent and Council Tax debt. Undertaking this increased workload has been aided by the appointment of a number of new housing focussed customer support roles as well as a full time Financial Inclusion Support Officer (FISO) funded by the Warwickshire Welfare Support Scheme for an initial pilot period of 12 months that started in January 2019. The FISO is already working intensively by targeting customers with the most complex needs and builds on extensive learning from NBBC who have appointed such officers within their service for a number of years. The FISO role has recently been held up as best practice by the Local Government Association in its publication "Reshaping Financial Support".
- 3.13 In addition to this support, in a further joint project with NBBC, the Housing and Community Services Team are working with the Veterans Contact Point and Ediblelinks to coordinate veteran support using Ministry of Defence funding for a two year period that started in May 2018. The work undertaken to date has achieved some excellent outcomes with individual veterans as well as the Silver Accreditation Level in recognition of the level of support and awareness training provided to promote support for ex-service personnel.

- 3.14 The Council ran another two very successful jobs fair alongside Jobcentre Plus that again demonstrated excellent opportunities to access local jobs and wider support. These were very well attended by both customers receiving out of work and disability related benefits and created some very positive outcomes in terms of moving people into employment as well as accessing wellbeing / financial support from our partners who attended.
- 3.15 The only real disappointing outcome during the year has been the continuing ongoing difficulty in developing the role or need for community hubs and information points. These were originally set up over a two year period from 2012 to enable access to ICT for all and promote the need for digital skills. However, their use for this purpose remains very low largely due to the rapid change in how residents are choosing to access the internet with wifi now freely available in many public places as well as the trend to increased use of mobile technology via phones and i-pads. As a result, this has meant that the use of the hubs and information points has been a lot lower than anticipated and when aligned with a lack of volunteers to support those without digital skills (who are increasingly in the minority) this has seen a number of facilities close during recent years where the facility has little or no other complimentary activities on offer to attract footfall.
- 3.16 As a result, the long term future of the hubs across the borough continues to be uncertain but we remain hopeful that because of activity created by the honesty shops and health related work undertaken by Ediblelinks in 2018 aligned with interest to run more localised and targeted activities by Public Health and Community Development teams that this may enable hubs to become better used and sustained with activities contributing towards costs or enabling income to be raised. The North Warwickshire Community Partnership continues to oversee and review these developments as shown in the document at Appendix B.
- 3.17 In summary, what the above key achievements demonstrate is that the Councils proactive approach to promoting financial and social inclusion has continued to develop during 2018, and our commitment to this holistic approach continues to enable positive outcomes both in terms of revenue collection and a better ability to support those residents, impacted by ongoing welfare changes to be achieved.

4 Key Priorities in 2019/20

- 4.1 In terms of setting priority actions going forward in 2019/20, the future will continue to remain financially uncertain, both externally and internally, and the challenges to the Council and its partners will continue to centre on delivering support around the following priorities:

1. The ongoing economic situation and its link to austerity measures.
2. Supporting customers impacted by the ongoing Welfare Reform changes, most notably, Universal Credit. These are already having a significant impact on both the Housing and Community Services divisions in delivering the support needed by our customers to ensure they can complete their application forms on line in a timely way and also clearly understand the expectations being placed on them once direct payments are made to pay their rent and other priority bills. It is also requiring the use of limited discretionary funds to make up the shortfall in rent to be used in a more targeted way.
3. Identifying how best to continue working together internally, and with partners, to make best use of finite resources to better support customers.

... 4.2 I have attached at Appendix A (pages 6 to 10), an extract of the key commitments from the Community Services Division service plan for 2019/20 in the area of financial inclusion that in summary will see:

- A comprehensive review of the current Council Tax Support Scheme with the other Warwickshire Districts;
- Developing closer working with Housing colleagues as well as the Department of Work and Pensions and Third Sector around ongoing welfare changes, Universal Credit and delivery of Universal Support to those struggling to meet their financial obligations;
- A review of the piloted scheme of FISO role as well as continuing to align more work on the financial inclusion agenda alongside NBBC wherever possible.
- The ongoing review of the viability and purpose of Community Hubs:
- Promoting the digital agenda via take up and use of the CRF and all on-line services as part of the wider bedding in of the new Revenues and Benefits system and Rent sense system, and
- The ongoing review and development of the Ediblelinks Partnership.

4.3 As a result of our approach that acknowledges the importance of building holistic solutions and how we best support customers needing help is increasingly being built into our standard operating model. This is making it the responsibility of an increasing number of officers to take more ownership in helping customers break dependency cycles wherever possible.

- 4.4 Restructures of the Community Services and Housing divisions in recent years have all addressed this as part of their ongoing reviews and reflected these expectations in revised job descriptions and structures. We anticipate this will continue to be undertaken as we better understand the issues created by the changing economy and how we are best providing support via ever closer collaborative going forward

5 Report Implications

5.1 Finance and Value for Money Implications

- 5.1.1 As a measure of our success, it is pleasing to report that in terms of in year and arrears collection performance in respect of Housing Rent and Council Tax, these remained at very high levels in 2017/18. This is in part due to the very proactive work being undertaken by the Council and partners as well as the decision to maintain a local Council Tax Support Scheme that has limited benefit cuts to only 8.5% since its introduction in 2013/14. This will continue for a sixth year in 2019/20.
- 5.1.2 However, the worrying trend nationally supported our own data is the adverse impact created by the introduction of Universal Credit aligned with the rising costs of utility bills and other necessary items above inflation. This has not just impacted on those already in financial difficulty but those on low incomes who are currently deemed “just coping”. Our analysis of those cases in significant Council Tax arrears as highlighted in Appendix B is indicating that many of these customers have significant multiple debts and they are ignoring them for longer meaning the situation becomes more serious, costly and difficult to resolve. An example of this is that in December, we undertook an exercise to contact 65 of the Councils most serious debt cases (covering debts totalling over £145,000). This involved hand delivering very personalised notices with a colour two page leaflet outlining different types of help and support available to customers to avoid a costly application being made for their committal to prison. Unfortunately, this resulted in only 3 households making contact (all whom had complex issues that are currently being supported by the FISO) and the rest simply ignoring the letter demonstrating the difficulties we are likely to face with engaging with these residents with only finite resources.
- 5.1.3 Initial monitoring of the impact of the roll out of Universal Credit on Council Tax collection is currently very difficult to ascertain due to the change in Revenues and Benefits system meaning that a meaningful “like for like” comparison will be difficult to provide until the end of March 2019. However, in respect of the 116 Council Tenants who have moved across onto Universal Credit to date, in spite of considerable efforts and support to these customers, over 90% are currently in arrears with rent payments due. Collectively, they owe £45,257 debt between them (an average of £390 per household or around 4 weeks arrears) with 22 of these households owing in excess of 7 weeks. The overall Housing Rent arrears total £277,542 as at beginning of February 2019.

- 5.1.4 The number of households contacting the Council because they are homeless or threatened with homelessness continues to increase. The change in legislation introduced in 2018 means that there are specific requirements on the Council to provide for close and extensive management of cases. This can be difficult because statutory and support services are under pressure. Many of these customers have multiple and complex circumstances that are not easily resolved without considerable support. Issues arising from welfare reforms are across all tenures. As such, we are increasingly seeing cases where residents are appearing not to be able to meet all their financial obligations as opposed to “won’t pay” them, all indications that access to the help and advice we are promoting via North Talk, the CRF and on social media is essential. This is why we have made “money matters information” the ongoing focus of regular North Talk articles to alert residents to ways of taking personal responsibility for improving their circumstances
- 5.1.5 In deciding the most appropriate method to be used to recover monies, officers are also having to have regard to the fact that the Council meet the full cost of recovering Council Tax debts (which in the case of taking a case to committal proceedings will be a minimum of £240 just to make the application) whilst only retaining 13% of any income collected. This currently means that despite the excellent recovery rates being achieved, a significant number of the outstanding debts due to the Council are unrealistic to pursue at this time because of the very high and often disproportionate costs that are involved in pursuing these doubtful debts where the debtor “can’t”, as opposed to “won’t” pay monies due. In all these cases as outlined in paragraph 5.1.2 it is expected that extensive support will need to be provided to support these residents, many of whom have ongoing liabilities, once engagement is possible in order to address their circumstances.
- 5.1.6 However, it also needs to be noted that funding to undertake the wider financial inclusion work undertaken in recent years has been resourced by utilising external grants to deliver these new burdens being placed on Councils to prepare customers for change. These have been provided by both Central Government as one off payments and also by making funding bids with partners, coupled with creating capacity by internal restructuring to free up capacity from areas of lower priority. However, with reducing and ongoing reductions in Central DWP grant being passed down as part of the austerity measures year on year, the pressures on securing adequate funding to support all current activities remains a considerable challenge under constant review.

5.1.7 In summary, our significant external recognition, higher than average collection rates of Council Tax and Housing Rent aligned with the year on year reductions in Council Tax Support and Housing Benefit caseloads helped by good local employment opportunities indicate that the Councils approach is working. However, underlying concerns remain around the increasing number of customers with whom getting regular payment and positive engagement will continue to prove difficult. It is officer's view that an increasing number of customers will be unable to cope with the impacts and expectations created by the welfare reforms and economic changes without considerable support which will impact on Council budgets and cash flow expectations in the future.

5.2 Legal, Data Protection and Human Rights Implications

5.2.1 The requirements of the General Data Policy Regulation.(GDPR introduced in May 2018) have required a significant review of our data sharing protocols to ensure we can continue to work effectively with partners in legally exchanging information on residents.

5.3 Safer Communities Implications

5.3.1 Better access to advice and assistance has many direct and indirect benefits that contribute to a greater feeling of wellbeing and community cohesiveness. This can only have a positive impact on the communities we serve.

5.4 Environment and Sustainability Implications

5.4.1 The Councils ongoing commitment to assist in helping people address or improve their financial circumstances or well-being has positive impacts. It is hoped that by providing this level of support, it will ensure that residents can learn new skills to enable them to rely less on our help going forward and help keep collection rates in terms of rent, council tax and housing benefit overpayments as high as possible by providing the correct levels of help and support.

5.5 Human Resources Implications

5.5.1 Ascertaining the right level and type of resources needed to deliver financial inclusion is under regular review, most notably by the Corporate Director (Community) and the Director (Housing) working closely with other internal colleagues. This has resulted in regular and ongoing restructuring of services and the decision to set up more formal shared / partnership arrangements wherever possible to deliver future challenges.

5.5.2 Overall, the Council's investment in staff and in developing effective partnerships has seen very positive outcomes being achieved but the complexity and challenges faced by staff in dealing with customers in these difficult circumstances cannot be understated.

5.6 Risk Management Implications

5.6.1 Failure to provide appropriate levels of customer support could have a detrimental impact on many areas on Council activity and lead to an increase in costs of collection or support being incurred. The Councils current approach enables us to be proactive as opposed to reactive in our response to issues or circumstances.

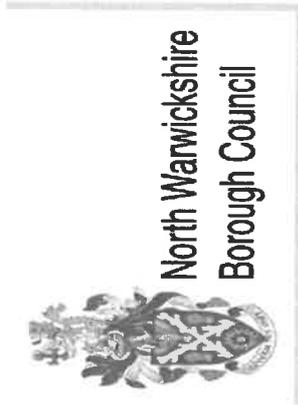
5.7 Links to Council's Priorities

5.7.1 The wide ranging activities undertaken under the overall Financial Inclusion approach cuts across virtually all Council priorities and in particular supports the three key corporate priorities of tackling poverty, improving health and well-being and promoting education, skills and employment.

5.8 Equalities Implications

5.8.1 The various methods and mediums used to promote financial inclusion activity ensure no group or individual is denied access to help or advice in respect of both Council and other complimentary services.

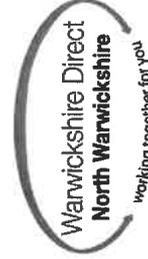
The Contact Officer for this report is Bob Trahern (719378).



Working in Partnership With

Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Service Plan 2019/20

“Striving to deliver Modern, Accessible Quality Services”



- To date, the service is in the minority Nationally in overachieving its Government targets to provide support to impacted customers who required Assisted Digital and Personal Budgeting Support. This was achieved by making significant improvements to our use of social media to promote positive messages and improved signposting and information to help and advice both electronically via the Customer Referral Form (CRF), with Ediblelinks, via our relationship and co location with the DWP and in North Talk
- The innovative work of the Division in relation to its in house developed CRF which is to be rolled out countywide during 2019 was featured as one of 20 National Case Studies by the Money Advice Service Nationally as a best practice model of supporting people in debt
- The Northern Warwickshire Financial Inclusion Partnership successfully bid for £100,000 of WLWS funding via WCC to fund a pilot to recruit 2 Financial Inclusion Support Officers to operate across Northern Warwickshire from January 2019 in further support of customers who are in significant financial difficulty. If successful, this may allow access to further WLWS reserves held by WCC of £400,000 to continue this work.
- The Service has continued to work very closely with Ediblelinks in expanding the food hub project and developing new partnership arrangements across NWBC, NBBC and beyond to supply excess chilled and non chilled food products. The arrangements have been expanded into taking delivery of increased supply on a daily basis in 3 vehicles donated by the Ocado Foundation. We also supported two successful bids for National funding totalling nearly £600,000 and continued to work with Ediblelinks to deliver increased emergency and non emergency support as well as Honesty Shops, community eating and other targeted activities particularly with schools and to achieve Health and Well Being targets .
- Some of these activities have also been delivered in support of the Armed Forces Covenant work to support veterans living in the borough from two new outlets opened in 2018 in Atherstone. This has been possible as a result of a successful bid for 2 years funding made with NBBC from which we have benefitted from a third share of £160,000 of Ministry Of Defence (MOD) funding for veteran support activity until mid 2020.
- The work on this project being coordinated with the Housing Division and delivered by the Veterans Contact Point was awarded the Silver Accreditation Level by the MOD in recognition of the level of support and awareness training provided in 2018.
- The division worked with policy colleagues to run 2 very successful jobs fairs 2017 alongside JC+
- We adopted the 2018/19 CTS scheme on time as well as all uprating and relevant legislation changes across the service during the year and alongside Housing colleagues in support of new homelessness responsibilities
- We also responded to 99.3% of Freedom Of Information requests and 100% of complaints received within legal and corporate timescales
- The ongoing delivery of the Firm step on-line and web form programme has been completed in line with our implementation plan. Over the last 12 months this has involved implementing the Housing Repairs service that has significantly increased the efficiency and delivery of that service and delivered a much more responsive and resilient service at lower cost. Other improvements particularly across the streetscape division have also been implemented.
- We continue to deliver a very high quality telephone, face to face service and new improved web chat facility to our customers demonstrated by the low waiting times for service and generally very positive feedback received from our customer service and approach. .
- We supported 1 member of staff qualify as an IRRV Technician and 6 Customer Contact Staff got an NVQ Level 2 qualification
- Undertook a number of Government data matching exercises that have identified and prevented fraud as well as allowing the Council to recover increased revenue in respect of Housing Benefit overpayments by using big data. This has also allowed NDR rate relief abuse to be identified successfully in respect of 10 cases.
- We implemented GDPR changes on time and continue to undertake significant work and awareness raising to ensure ongoing compliance.

Future Issues and Priorities

- Ongoing review of the impact of the wider Welfare Reforms and delivery of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) expectations
- Dealing with the impact and delays attributed to the ongoing migration to Universal Credit (as well as other ongoing welfare reforms) particularly as this is compounded when aligned with the ongoing uncertainty surrounding future funding and reducing administration subsidy. Due to the current climate, additional ad hoc grants are being paid by the DWP to undertake new burdens but what we will receive going forward, workforce planning and managing the expectations of customers and partners is proving evermore difficult. A DWP decision announced in October 2018 to transfer the funding currently received to provide Assisted Digital and Personal Budgeting Support from April 2019 to the local CAB will require a political steer on how and what support we can provide in the future.
- The ongoing support of the community projects around access and emergency help and support remains a key issue and priority in terms of whether we have sufficient demand and funding to continue to support them. Issues remain around identifying funding from external sources, attracting volunteers and working with communities which is a key threat to the sustainability of any outreach initiative
- The challenge of getting people engaged to address debt and benefit responsibilities whether on line or face to face is increasingly challenging where a small but increasing number of individuals are not taking responsibility to help themselves and improve their life chances
- The ongoing need for a more corporate prioritisation of debt approach; and the need to have regard to the financial implications of recovering Council Tax, Housing Rent, Housing Benefit Overpayment, Sundry Debts & NDR debts. This is particularly important as we move to full adoption of UC.
- The need to maximise New Homes Bonus and NDR growth and reduce losses from rates avoidance and evasion / mitigate the impact of HS2
- Identifying any further changes that will make the shared service arrangement with NBBC even better. This could include seeking to expand the shared service beyond its current operation
- The uncertainty around the future of Non Domestic Rates and whether it is fit for purpose remains a huge concern to the future of LG finance.

Challenges and Concerns

- The Level of Government Funding continues to reduce as a result of ongoing CSR requirements, & will reduce further in line with the planned transfer of our Housing Benefit caseload into Universal Credit. This is alongside the wider needs of the Council to deliver ongoing sustainable savings over the next three years. This is needing to be achieved against a backdrop of increasing demands from a relatively small but challenging number of impacted customers as they look to the Council to provide greater help and support around their personal and housing needs. In many cases, this support has been delivered by services from other agencies that have either been fully withdrawn or reduced in scope.
- Workforce planning, staff retention, and dealing with increasingly difficult customer issues and its impact on performance, sickness levels and overall morale within the service
- Relationship with partners, in particular WCC and JC+ – evermore work is needed to maintain positive relationships and deliver on joint Government and Member agendas / priorities around the long term unemployed and our most vulnerable customers health and well being
- Reducing management resources both corporately and within the Division going forward is making delivering on all fronts increasingly difficult

Action	Corporate Objective	Lead Officer	Start Date	End Date	Priority	Measurement of Success	Resources
Staffing / Human Resource Matters							
Hold at least quarterly meetings of the Shared Service governance board	Quality Service Provision VFM	CD - C R&B Manager CD - R (NBBC)	April 2019	March 2020	H	Meetings held and reviews completed and reported to Members where necessary	None other than already committed
Review the shared management, performance and operational arrangements put in place with NBBC and make recommendations as to any proposals on the future direction of the service. These will include;						Changes implemented in line with decisions	If any changes are proposed and approved, the existing budget will need reviewing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ongoing need for FISO Officers following the 12 month pilot by Dec'ber 2019 Reviewing job roles in light of ongoing welfare reform & system changes and the need for agency staff Aligning appropriate policies, approaches, & processes. This will include adoption of a consistent CTS scheme Expanding arrangements to include other partners where interest & business need exist. This could include sharing parts of the service where resilience issues exist or where greater synergies could be achieved 			September 2019	November 2019	H	Delivering business case expectations	
			September 2019	January 2020	H		
			April 2019	March 2020	H		
			April 2019	March 2020	H		

Action	Corporate Objective	Lead Officer	Start Date	End Date	Priority	Measurement of Success	Resources
Partnership and Financial Inclusion Commitments							
Oversee the operation of the NW FIP to deliver and coordinate Financial Inclusion (F.I) activity in the borough	Health and Well Being Theme Quality Service Provision	CD - C B & FI Manager	April 2019	March 2020	H	Regular meetings and Action Points implemented An approach is agreed for advice activity to be undertaken internally and with partners	Activity of the CAB, Credit Union and Warwickshire Welfare Rights continues to be reviewed as part of the wider borough wide and countywide commissioning of advice services by WCC Internal F.I. support will continue to be delivered by R&B and Housing staff
Work with the Countywide FIP as well as NBBC via our shared work on this agenda to determine the best approach around the commissioning and funding of advice services and complementary activity. This will focus on being party to Lottery and WLWS bids coordinated regionally where possible (to include the FISO review)	Customer Access WCC Priority	CD - C R&B Mgr B & FI Mgr D (CD) Policy Support D (CD) Policy Support	April 2019	March 2020	H		
Continue to develop effective operational & liaison arrangements with the DWP to determine an agreed role for the Council in delivering Universal Support. This will be based on having a financial and political mandate to undertake this work following the transfer of funding to the CAB in April 2019	Customer Access Strategy Quality Service Provision VFM	CD - C R&B Mgr CCM B & FI M	April 2019	March 2020	H	New working practices agreed	None other than those already identified New burdens funding has been provided to date but will in respect of Universal Support will be transferred in 2019 onwards by the DWP
Continue to look for funding and other joint working opportunities to prepare people for UC and mitigate the outcomes from other welfare reforms		CD - C B & FI Manager R & B Mgr	April 2019	March 2020	M	Successful Funding Bids	Additional support will be available from Jobcentre plus staff

Action	Community Plan Objective	Lead Officer	Start Date	End Date	T/L Priority	Measurement of Success	Resources
<p>Continue to work alongside, and support the CAB, FISO's and our CEA's. This will be undertaken by promoting the awareness of help and support, agreeing process to be followed, using the CRF & making proactive referrals. These will include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining the best approach for dealing with customers in debt in a corporate way • Implementing and reviewing alternative enforcement remedies to be used. This will be undertaken where necessary alongside Housing & SD • Promoting budgeting support available <p>Enter peer awards if our performance and partnership working continues to deliver outstanding outcomes</p>	<p>Quality Service Provision Health and Well Being Customer Access Strategy VFM The Local Economy WCC Priority</p>	<p>CD - C R&B M R Mgr B & FI Manager D (H) D (CD)</p>	<p>April 2019</p>	<p>March 2020</p>	<p>H</p>	<p>A customer focused debt advice and information service being delivered and accessible to all residents</p> <p>Ongoing high collection rates</p> <p>Cost effective and realistic enforcement methods deployed</p> <p>Write offs approved in appropriate cases</p> <p>A reduction in the arrears position across all debt types</p> <p>Shortlisted for the award following submission</p>	<p>The Councils main funding to support the CAB is coordinated via the Community Development Division and Housing Division.</p> <p>New burdens funding has been provided to date by the DWP and we have been able to access along with charity partners and other Councils access to external funding that will help inform current activity</p> <p>If any changes are proposed and approved, the existing budget will need reviewing and approving</p>

Action	Corporate Objective Divisional Objective	Lead Officer	Start Date	End Date	T/L Priority	Measurement of Success	Resources
Continue to work with other Councils, The Armed Forces Covenant, FISO's and welfare agencies to promote awareness of ongoing Welfare Reforms and maximising entitlement/ access to help and support in a collaborative way where possible	Quality Service Provision The Local Economy Health and Well Being WCC Priority	CD - C R & B Mgr B & F.I Manager	April 2019	March 2020	H	Advice and Signposting being provided by a number of mediums in a coordinated way via <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Talk • Website • Targeted letters Increased take up of benefits or schemes	Within existing resources Any future activity will have to be subject of any successful external bids or utilising Government funding specifically provided to help promote awareness or take up campaigns
Continue to promote fuel poverty & water save messages with Public and Private Sector partners as well as the Housing Division / Public Health and CAB	Quality Service Provision, Health and Well Being	R & B Mgr B & F.I Manager D (H) Policy	April 2019	March 2020	M	Incorporate joined up messages in any targeted campaigns on website and in North Talk Action Plans agreed	None internally – funding to run the service is reliant on agreed funding being identified from, WCC
Continue to support FIP Partners in particular CD, WCC, Public Health and JC Plus to promote and develop activities that support the better delivery of the Councils Community Partnership Agenda, Health and Well Being Action Plan & delivery of community hubs	Corporate themes of Health and Well Being Better Access Improving Skills and Aspirations	CD - P CD - C D (CD) D (H) WCC Lead	April 2019	March 2020	H	Agreed projects being delivered Outcome reports communicated to Members via the NWCPC, C&E Reports, Health & Well Being Boards and any other appropriate groups	None other than already committed Explore opportunities for external funding. Any bids will need to be supported from existing resources

Action	Corporate Objective Divisional Objective	Lead Officer	Start Date	End Date	T/L Priority	Measurement of Success	Resources
Continue to work alongside Edibelinks; NBBC and OCADO / ALDI to determine the future ongoing delivery model of the food hub and the delivery and ongoing viability of its operation to meet its lottery commitments	Health and Well Being Theme Quality Service Provision Customer Access	CD - C CP Officer	April 2019	March 2020	H	Food Banks operating successfully in support of the WLWS scheme and the Councils own referral process / corporate debtors Complimentary support to our welfare and health commitments	Existing Resources Discussions will continue with members to determine ongoing local support to continue this initiative
Assist in identifying future funding streams with other external funding providers		CD - C B & FIM D (CD)	April 2019	March 2020	H	This may involve seeking to get contributions from other agencies and organisations benefitting from these provisions, or stopping the operation in full or part in line with available resources.	
An ongoing review of internal referral process in terms of the provision of emergency food support		R & B Mgr B & FI Mgr R Mgr D (H)	April 2019	March 2020	H	Making a positive difference on welfare, health and well being grounds within the borough The ongoing delivery of honesty shops and other community related activities	
Support future projects to utilise food supplied		CD - C B & FIM	April 2019	March 2020	M		
Assist in the OCADO Christmas Eve "Turkey Run" project		CD - C CP Officer	October 2018	December 2019	M		
Continue to align work commitments alongside the Armed Forces work and other FIP partners		CD - C D (H)	April 2019	March 2020	M		

Action	Divisional Objective	Lead Officer	Start Date	End Date	T/L Priority	Measurement of Success	Resources
<p>Determine the future direction of Community Hubs</p> <p>Until then and if retained assist in supporting the ongoing development of the Community Hubs. This will involve promoting but not directly delivering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A variety of Community Focused Activities around health & well being, job clubs, social eating, cooking etc alongside WCC and DWP Promoting the facilities and the technology within them as information points Assist the hubs and CAVA identify volunteers to help resource the hubs deliver outcomes <p>Review location of facilities in line with possible WCC and Public Health involvement</p>	<p>Customer Access Strategy Quality Service Provision</p> <p>Health and Well Being theme links</p> <p>Access theme links</p> <p>Improving Education and Aspiration Theme links</p>	<p>CD - C/ CCM D (CD) B& FI Mgr</p>	<p>April 2019</p> <p>April 2019</p>	<p>November 2019</p> <p>March 2020</p>	<p>H</p>	<p>Each hub open for over 15 hours per week and supporting a variety of programmes to local communities</p> <p>Use of the facilities by communities and organisations making the hubs vibrant and engaging.</p> <p>Delivery of programmes by multi agency with partners and volunteers / paid staff</p>	<p>None other than already committed</p> <p>Explore opportunities for external funding from other partners or elsewhere. Any bids will need to be supported from existing resources</p> <p>Carried Forward underspend on Access budget could be used for funding agreed key activities</p> <p>CAVA identifying monies for the hubs to thrive</p> <p>Armed Forces Covenant Funding and Ediblelinks activity</p>
<p>Determine the appropriate ongoing use of the B.O.B Bus. This is likely to include use by FISO's, the AF covenant work, UC support and CD</p>	<p>Customer Access Strategy Quality Service Provision</p>	<p>CD - C/ CCM D (CD) B& FI Mgr</p>	<p>April 2019</p>	<p>March 2020</p>	<p>M</p>	<p>Vehicles being used at appropriate events at least 20 days per year and by partners where appropriate</p>	<p>None other than already committed</p>



North Warwickshire Community Partnership Quarterly progress report – December 2018

Champion: Report by Bob Trahern

Theme: Tackling Poverty (previously Access)

Commentary on Project Progress – achievements to date (and any slippage)

Actions since last report in August 2018

During the last 3 months we have continued to make very good progress building on the written update provided in August in relation to the commitments in respect of the “Tackling Poverty” agenda. All activity has continued to focus on

- Evermore joining up our approach around recovering debts due
- Reviewing enhancements to the Councils Food Operation
- Reviewing and understanding the size of the problems to address issues being faced by customers impacted by the Welfare Reforms
- Consolidating and promoting the use of the Community Hubs & increasing volunteer activities
- Supporting the Councils Channel Shift and Digital Agenda ambitions

Progress since the last report

Debt Collection Progress

The Council continues to show strong performance in its collection of monies due in year plus arrears as highlighted from information reported to this board last cycle as well as the most recent update provided to Members that I attach below in italics and update the information where appropriate

2.1.2 In 2017/18, the Council recovered 99.91% of the £49,300,000 Non Domestic Rates due in year which was the highest we have ever achieved and which placed the Council as the 2nd highest performing authority in the country in respect of both in year charges and in the top 5 Councils Nationally in respect of arrears. In total, the Council had just under £100,000 to collect in respect of all years charges as at 31 March 2018. It is pleasing to report that this resulted in the Council being Highly Commended for its performance and approach at the recent IRRV awards in October 2018.

2.1.3 In respect of Council Tax, in 2017/18, we achieved a performance of 98.6% of the £36,237,000 due in year which based on 2017/18 National data placed us as the 55th best performing Councils in the country in spite of our deprivation. In addition, we reduced our outstanding arrears due up to 31 March 2017 by over 39% during the year and all this was achieved despite sending over 40%

less instructions to our civil enforcement agents.

- 2.1.4 In terms of Housing Benefit Overpayments, in 2017/18, the Council collected 61.53% of the total value of invoices of £714,163 raised in year. We know from high level benchmarking data recently released by the Government that this is above average performance. It should be noted that the challenge of collecting these debts, many identified via data matching exercises with HMRC that can be backdated a number of years, cannot be understated as it involves collecting in many cases significant overpayments of Housing Benefits from those customers already on the lowest income levels.*
- 2.1.5 It should be noted that in regard to the recovery of Housing Benefit Overpayments, any collection rate achieved in excess of 60% is beneficial to the Council because of the relationship with the Government subsidy scheme. The Council has consistently achieved this target over many years and this produces additional income to the Council, It is anticipated that collection of Housing Benefit Overpayments as well as other debts is going to become increasingly challenging going forward particularly now the Council is fully live with Universal Credit because the ability to recover debts at source and from customers in a timely way will be more difficult.*
- 2.1.6 In respect of housing rents, the Council achieved a collection rate of 98.71% of rent due. Again no National data exists to compare performance but it is reasonable to assume this would place us as a very good performer Nationally. However, based on learning from other Councils following the full roll out of Universal Credit, officers are anticipating this performance will reduce by an as yet unknown amount in the future. Therefore significant additional effort is already and increasingly being required to support customers to maintain acceptable collection levels in order to make successful applications, overcome the initial short term delay in receiving Universal Credit payments and thereafter cope with the less regular way that benefit is paid. This is presenting impacts on resources both internally as well as on our partners, most notably Ediblelinks and the Citizens Advice Service.*

The Council via its Housing team have recently increased its staffing to assist with this issue and the new responsibilities created under increased homelessness legislation. They have also invested in new predictive software to assist in giving early identification of potential arrear cases. These aligned with the very close working with the Revenues and Benefits teams who are also migrating onto a new software system in November is ensuring the Council is well placed to deal with the changing environment.

- 2.1.7 In summary, the Council's very high and consistent levels of performance aligned with the best practice approach adopted by the Council over many years to achieve these outcomes cannot be underestimated. This has once again been reflected by the significant number of award successes in the last 12 months, and most recently in the 3 awards received at the IRRV National Conference in October where the Council won the best innovation category for its Ediblelinks project and were Highly Commended in the Excellence in NDR and Excellence in Social Inclusion categories. We also were finalists in the best Partnership category recognising our excellent joined up approach and were the most successful Council Nationally on the night . These awards acknowledge the continuing proactive and innovative practices adopted by the Council and its partners in support of its residents to assist them during what are difficult financial times.*

- 2.1.8 *Unfortunately, when collecting monies there will always be debts that are deemed irrecoverable for a wide variety of reasons. In many cases, the debts that are deemed uncollectable are outside the Council's control and are because of insolvency proceedings, the debtor passing away leaving no estate or simply absconding leaving no forwarding address despite efforts to trace in line with our guidelines. However, we are increasingly coming across cases where the debtor "can't", as opposed to "won't" pay monies due. In these cases significant support is being needed to find ways of supporting these residents both via our own resources using our in house developed customer referral form, the Edible links food hub, as well as our financial inclusion partners to address their circumstances.*
- 2.1.9 *This is meaning that in an increasing number of cases, it is becoming more apparent that some debts may be deemed irrecoverable due to the hardship it would cause in paying them or because the cost/effort expended in recovering debts is disproportionate. This is particularly in Council Tax cases where the Council meets 100% of the collection costs which will range from a minimum of £240 upwards yet retains only 13% of monies collected. In these cases, despite a request to the County Council to seek to share the financial risk by contributing towards the costs of collection which can be significant in order to make it economically viable to pursue through the courts or via charging orders or insolvency as in the individual case highlighted for write off in tis report. This has received a negative response,*
- 2.1.10 *As a result, Members should be aware that the level of write offs are expected to increase significantly in the future particularly in respect of Council Tax based on "value for money" reasons. It is also likely that write off of Former Tenant Arrears and Housing Benefit Overpayments will also increase following the roll out of Universal Credit and as other welfare and economy changes take effect.*

COUNCIL TAX ANALYSIS ARREARS UPDATE

The Council has taken the decision to review every debt owed to it as part of the migration exercise onto its new system that is used by its shared service partner NBBC. This has resulted in a much clearer understanding of the likely collection of monies which in a number of cases cuts across a number of years despite extensive efforts to engage with customers and use a wide variety of enforcement remedies.

We currently have 1878 unique debts due up to and including 31 March 2018 totalling £916,403.17 (see table overleaf). Around £330,000 is owed by 385 debtors who have left the borough (with no ongoing liability) and the remainder by current residents who will have ongoing 2018/19 charges as well in many cases (606 debtors or 3.4% of households)

Nearly £400,000 of this debt has been to the bailiffs (around 45% of all debt due) but remains uncollected and we are currently either collecting it, have a charging order secured on the debt or are trying to determine the best way of collecting it.

Of this, we have already instigated over the last 12 months extensive work necessary to take 8 cases to the stage of a charging order or bankruptcy which to date has cost the Council in the region of £6,000 in legal costs. This has seen us pursue 2 Council Tax case to bankruptcy and we are in the process of making 5 further cases identified as having potential assets either to a stage of getting a Charging Order to seek sale of their property or bankruptcy. These 7 cases total approximately £71,000

of the arrears due (or nearly 8% of the debt due to the Council) but indicate how difficult and expensive some debts will be to collect.

Of the remaining debts at what we call the DOOR stage (those that have been unsuccessful despite using bailiffs) , a disproportionate number are tenants, & many are either self employed, in and out of work, on very low wages and/or who are very transient. The time necessary to engage and deal with their issues cannot be understated and many are unable to maintain regular payment without prompting or support or just ignore all attempts to discuss matters whether prompted by letter, e mail or face to face contact

Having said all this, the table below shows the current stages of recovery for each debt and we know from benchmarking that the Council is incredibly well placed Nationally when comparing performance levels. Based on all years, the amounts collected indicate around 9.5% plus of all debts raised are collected and we have already outperformed the expectations that only around 98.5% will be collected.

Recovery Level	Sum of notice_balance	
Pre Summons Arrangements - Clear by 31/3/19	83711.62	
AOB - deducted at £3.70 per week	63250.02	
AOB Pending	74877.58	
AOE - variable deductions based on wages	62128.41	
AOE pend	52497.05	
arrange - variable dependent on circumstances	107053.31	
bailiff - mainly debts from last 2 years	114216.46	
charge order – DOOR	70526.45	
DOOR	174884.48	
liab order – Pre Bailiffs	53990.17	
Pending Action - DOOR	7420.74	
Retd WC - no match - DOOR	14007.63	
Retd WC full name match - DOOR	37839.25	
Grand Total	916403.17	
Row Labels	Number of Balances To 31/3/17	Number of Unique debtors
Pre summons arrangement	169	169
AOB	265	265
AOB Pending	247	
AOE	161	100
AOE pend	82	
Post summons arrangement	244	128
bailiff	260	124
charge order	63	5
door	243	79
liab ord	86	86
Retd WC full match	36	23
Retd WC no name match	22	12
Grand Total	1878	991

Conclusion

These should be viewed as excellent results for the Council in what are very challenging times for collection of monies and the ongoing delivery of welfare reforms. To achieve these we believe our financial Inclusion approach delivered with partners is helping those customers who are struggling to pay and it is on these customers that we will continue to focus our efforts in 2019 onwards as it is clear from our own data and the local CAB that those customers who are in arrears are going to need increased help to ensure they can either improve their income levels or reduce their expenditure in order to meet all their financial commitments. Many of these may also be impacted by Universal Credit changes going forward.

So all in all, a very positive year in terms of performance and clear evidence that the Shared Service arrangements, Financial Inclusion approach with partners, co location with the DWP and links between the front office and back office we have in place are working as we ready ourselves to change computer systems in November. This we know will have an impact on the performance levels in the second half of the year when we shut down for 3 weeks from mid November to migrate data and the suspension of recovery action on current debt until January 2019. However, proactive work will continue on pursuing arrears and analysing all Housing Benefit overpayments outstanding and we remain confident that we may not see the downturn normally experienced following a system migration due to the current work position of the division which is good. We remain on track exceeding our performance in the first 8 months of 2018/19 on last years already high outturn and this means we are keeping ourselves in a strong position to recover from this change when we go live on the new system which usually sees a downturn because of stopping recovery action for 6 to 8 weeks.

Welfare Update

There is little to add to last quarters report. We have now gone live with the full roll out of Universal Credit service across the whole of the borough in September 2018. This has seen considerable demand already on our staff to help people complete on line forms, discuss their financial position and has also seen an increase in food bank referrals. We know that the change will have significant impact most notably in the short term in respect of customers moving onto the new benefit which have been widely reported Nationally and this is a major concern and risk for us going forward.

Whilst it is too early to say if we will experience the significant increase in rent and council tax arrears being experienced Nationally, we are confident that we are well placed to address these challenges due to the following factors;

- The co-location of the DWP in our OSS meaning it is possible to provide a very joined up approach
- The relationship we have with our local DWP colleagues
- Our embedded financial inclusion approach and experienced staff,
- Our CRF and close links to the food hub and other support

The proposed Government changes recently announced will help assist in the transition period onto universal credit although many are delayed being introduced over the next 12 – 30 months and can be summarised as follows;

- *Waiting days are to be abolished from February 2018 and all claimants will be eligible for Universal Credit from the first day they claim it.*

- *Claimants transitioning from Housing Benefit will be entitled to an additional two weeks' worth of support while they wait for their first Universal Credit payment. This measure, which will take effect in April, is designed to reduce the issue of housing arrears.*
- *The amount of support a claimant can receive through an advance payment is to increase to 100%, and this can be paid back over the course of a year at a slower rate.*
- *The Secretary of State promised to issue new guidance next month to ensure that claimants in the private rented sector will be able to choose for their housing costs to be paid directly to their landlord*
- *Changes to assumptions around self employed income in the first year of trading*

Whilst this should make things easier, there remain significant issues which will impact both UC customers and the Council. In respect of the latter, we are already needing to consider a number of policy changes to determine how we will support customers from April 2019 when the small amount of money Councils were recovering to support customers transfers to the Citizens Advice to undertake support to apply on line and budget. We are also seeking to simplify our Local Council Tax Support scheme for 2020/21 to ensure it compliments the move to UC. The impact of both these changes will mean that helping customers avoid falling into arrears with rent / council tax will be ever more challenging.

One positive and an update on use of the significant reserve of £650,000 held in the WCC WLWS fund is that we have been able to agree with NBBC and RBC how we spend the £150,000 funding awarded to the three councils for a 12 month period to fund projects that must demonstrate clear outcomes of how they are addressing poverty and helping to break dependency cycles. The majority of the money is being used to employ 3 Financial Inclusion officers across the 3 boroughs from January 2019 based on the successful model followed by NBBC for 12 months to provide intensive support to some of our most vulnerable customers. We are also looking at promoting some Free School Meal and Fuel Poverty promotion and a small amount of funding will contribute to the wider development and promotion of the CRF form developed by NWBC that will be rolled out across the whole of the county.

It has been agreed with WCC that if this targeted work is successful after 12 months, that it should be possible to access further monies from the ring fenced underspend. It is envisaged that this work will be vital as the evidence is clearly showing that the impacts of Universal Credit, already significant in NBBC and RBC who adopted the new changes over 12 months ago is having a massive impact on support services ability to cope with increased pressure (some county, some district, some third sector) which in some cases is seeing families evicted and the costs and issues being created more than if the situation had been ignored. See the community hubs update later for an update on how it is hoped these officers will be deployed in NWBC.

In addition to UC, we are also working with Housing delivering the new homelessness responsibilities introduced in April 2018 as well as how we best use limited discretionary budgets provided by Central Government to meet the housing gap between rent due and benefit paid. What is becoming very clear is that we are needing to continually review how we manage our finite resources as the demands on this area of work is increasing significantly as customers and landlords are dealing with the impact on their incomes and how benefits are paid

In conclusion, despite these challenges it remains pleasing that this joined up

approach which has been promoted and advocated by the Council for a number of years and overseen by this partnership is becoming evermore widely accepted as being key to delivery of positive outcomes with the reduced resources available and has been accepted as the way to deliver positive outcomes (see also the food hub update below).

The Council and its work with partners, in addition to winning its third National award for its work with Ediblelinks at the IRRV awards in October 2018, is also featured as one of 11 National LG case studies in a National Money Advice Service publication that is to be launched in December that promotes our innovative approach that is delivering these performance figures and building on our recent award success.

Food Projects

Since the last report, I am very pleased that things continue to gain momentum under the Ediblelinks brand that is now fully being coordinated and managed by the Healthy Living Network.

I attach information at Appendix A that is their Quarter Two report. Since this report was drafted, further significant work has been undertaken to dovetail its activity with the Armed Forces work that is seeing the two projects share a space in the Arcade in Atherstone on a regular basis and also work closer on a number of related employment and support projects that cut across both projects that is promoting health and well being, involving access to evermore honesty shops and presence at a number of key events, the next being Dickens Night.

The work of the food hub continues to be seen as an integral part of the Councils support of those in poverty and evermore about positively promoting access to affordable, healthy alternatives to helping people manage on a budget.

Its work across the health agenda is a key strand of the local health offer which will be picked up in Rachel Robinsons report and formed part of the CHAW work it is delivering already in the borough.

Community Hubs

The work on supporting the community hubs continues but the different ambitions and nature of the 5 remaining hubs has reached a critical point that now necessitates a major review of how they need to operate in order for the to remain viable that is planned to be undertaken in 2019.

Meetings have been ongoing over the last 18 to 24 months to try and encourage wider use by all partners (and more importantly providing resources to deliver help and support) to align them with the "what we have been advised" shared ambitions of the County Council whose own local pilot "Lets Talk" has recently failed due to low demand. Alongside the County customer services teams pilot, attempts have been made to also work alongside Public Health as part of the local JSNA work to try and deliver some health related services out of hubs which also has only been achieved in part via the CHAW work commissioned from the Healthy Living Network which means this isn't a sustainable or viable model. Because of UC, the DWP have also not been able to support any outreach events because of resourcing issues other than the very successful jobs fairs that Julie Taylor has been instrumental in coordinating from the Memorial Hall (covered in the Raising Aspiration report).

There was also a failed attempt to secure alternative use of the Partnership Centre,

Atherstone in May by a number of interested partners due to the slowness of decision making process despite support from Public Health of a building owned by WCC. We understand that the Town Council have recently started new discussions to determine if they could take on the building which may create the opportunity to use the building again for partnership purposes in the near future.

A number of different conversations continue around how hubs are best supported which will need to involve our own Community Development Team, the WCC Localities Team, Public Health, the Armed Forces Covenant Officer with Ediblelinks and Citizens Advice as the two key third sector groups as organisations who are all committed to delivering community projects.

Where possible, and as many compliment each other, we need to use these finite resources cooperatively but the lack of delivery resource and community engagement continues to be the main stumbling block to making delivery of resilient outreach work possible. This will need to be addressed as a priority post election to determine how and if hubs continue and in what format.¹

As part of the wider commitment to promote digital services and channel shift which was the key driver for establishing hubs in 2011, we now know that two thirds of access to our website is made via mobile technology (i.e.) phones and I-pads as opposed to PC's /Laptops. This was confirmed in a recent report taken to the Resources Board in November which is evidencing how contact preferences are changing and how the Council and its partner are using social media evermore to promote activities. We are also continuing to promote accessibility to ICT by internal Council staff working with those residents who come to our attention who do not have the skills to apply for their benefits as well as regular articles in North Talk to signpost to online and other help and support available.

The B.O.B bus continues to be used on an hoc basis across the borough and in NBBC at targeted events following the loss of external funding that was supporting its costs but the armed forces monies may allow this to be used wider again alongside monies also available to provide Personal Budgeting and Assisted Digital support as part of our UC support and offer.

Changes to the action plan

Making progress is largely dependent on being able to access internal / external resources and funding and is being delivered against the backdrop of the ever challenging environment in which we work. As such, we will continue to review our ability to continue to deliver on the many fronts we are currently engaged in what amounts to a very small team. The need to work in partnership with internal colleagues (e.g.) Housing, Community Development, DWP, WCC and other third sector partners is integral to us continuing to be successful and maintaining momentum on the wide ranging, proactive and innovative work undertaken to date and promoted in the June edition of North Talk particularly around the food hub and support for veterans and is something we are working on and trying to align actions and priorities. This will be integral if we are to continue to deliver cross cutting support to customers

The importance of building holistic solutions and how we better support customers needing help is increasingly being built into our standard practices and procedures. This is making it the responsibility of an increasing number of officers to take more ownership in helping customers break dependency cycles wherever possible. Restructures of the Community Services and Housing divisions in recent years have all addressed this as part of their reviews and reflected these expectations in revised

job descriptions and structures and we anticipate this will continue to be undertaken and help with ever closer collaborative working with our partners going forward.

Expected Outcomes

Positive engagement with a wide variety of customers and improved access to a wide range of services and information are being delivered in partnership and innovatively. This has seen us be flagged up as a site of excellence by our peers and has seen us be very successful in bidding for external funding. Our approach has built on our member and officer commitment to these agendas and the positive results that continue to be delivered many in partnership and despite the difficult financial and economic climate are testament to this.

Expenditure (SCS Funding)

	Predicted Expenditure	Actual Expenditure
No allocated budget remains. The corporate access to services budget that is funding ongoing hub costs are the only funds available but working with partners has brought in a huge amount of monies in the last 6 months to the borough (in excess of £650k outside NWBC resources)		
We have been allocated monies to support customers migrating to universal credit although at this time it is considered that it is unlikely to be sufficient based on our experiences on the SMART project. We will be reviewing how we are best using this money on a regular basis and will monitor this position		
We now have access to our shared of the Armed Forces Covenant of circa £54,000 over the next 18 months until mid 2020		

Publicity

- We continue to attend a significant number of internal and external officer and partner meetings to raise awareness, review better partnership working and plan future activity of all related activities.
- North Talk continues to promote activity in a very proactive way and we also are using social media with great success which has been key in hitting our target audiences .
- Proposals on how we continue to promote our work as outlined in this report continues to be key to ensuring residents in the borough are aware of what support, help and opportunities are available. .

Lessons learnt

- Relying on volunteers and third sector partners who have limited capacity and resources to develop new projects and support ongoing initiatives is hugely challenging and means significant demands on limited officer time continues to be needed.
- Ongoing difficulties with recruiting volunteers remain because of employment

opportunities in the area and the general lack of numbers coming forward locally despite ongoing promotion

- Making progress in these difficult times and partnership working continues to get ever harder and our ambitions are not always met by our available resources. Many of the agencies we work with indicate they are only commissioning services that have no capacity to undertake front line delivery which will need to be addressed if hubs and wider ambitions around making lasting changes to people health and aspirations are to be made.

Sustainability of project

This is a key requirement and aim of all work being carried out to date and a key feature of any activity agreed to see how it can be supported long term by changing working practices to free up resources or identifying a suitable revenue stream where a need arises. There are clear examples that this is demonstrated in all parts of this report as to how we are seeking to make the work we are doing possible at a time of reducing resources.

In essence the work being promoted by the partnership around tackling poverty has become embedded into the Councils corporate and service plans making the activities undertaken part of the “way we do business” as opposed to a separate strand of activity.

Whatever happens, our work in this area is now about consolidation and utilising the resources we have and arrangements set up to help support customers improve their life chances and circumstances by providing access to the most appropriate tools and help available.

MUNICIPAL JOURNAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS 2019

EDIBLELINKS – THE HEALTHY LIVING NETWORK, OCADO PLC AND NORTH WARWICKSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

DELIVERING BETTER OUTCOMES



Summary

Ediblelinks is a cross-sector, cross boundary, multi-partnership programme seeking to address food poverty and diet related ill health.

Ediblelinks brings together partners from the private, public and third sector to share skills, knowledge and experience. This cross sector working is driving innovation to create a sustainable, economically viable delivery model that is improving individual and community resilience whilst delivering “more for less” using food surplus from which others are learning.



What Makes Us Different ?

This project is unlike any other. Ediblelinks is a multi-sector partnership supporting a wide range of “not for profit” organisations delivery cross cutting, cross organisational initiatives tailored to meet local need. It is backed by a leading UK online supermarket. This approach is unique and its breadth of support is indicative of the integrated nature of its work.

Developed from a seed of an idea in January 2013 as a replacement to the Social Fund and opened 13 weeks later with a homelessness charity, in 2016 the involvement of the Healthy Living Network, a health inequalities focussed charity saw the creation of the Ediblelinks brand with a strong emphasis on a bottom up approach. Since this time, the project has delivered significant innovation, scaled up its service offer ten-fold, been rolled out to reach new areas and improved outcomes in a unique multi agency initiative with prevention at its core. We now have a 35 hours per/week service delivering our shared corporate, community and financial partnership ambitions designed to “Help Others, HelpThemselves”

—

Ediblelinks - a Multi Agency Innovation

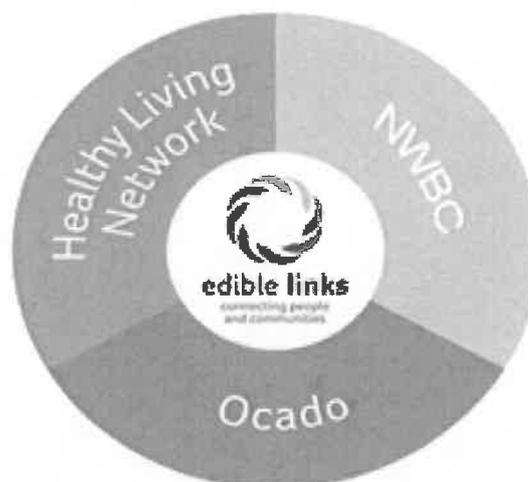
Ediblelinks is a ground breaking cross-sector partnership joining up public, private and not for profit organisations that cuts across traditional and geographical boundaries

“Addressing the wider impacts of Welfare Returns whilst demand and expectations on public services are on the increase”

“Food waste on an industrial scale”

“Public Health – addressing well being by changing hearts and minds”

“A Partnership successfully bridging the gap in communities that austerity measures have created”



Ocado who located in the borough in 2012 have been involved in this relationship since its inception. Originally donating food waste one day per week, the delivery model has developed into a “well grooved” daily operation facilitating our growth and encouraging us to “**Think Big**”. As such, their support has grown in line with ambitious plans and in February 2018 saw Ocado donate three refrigerated vans purchased using plastic bag tax proceeds that has enabled fresh surplus food to be added to the existing ambient operation taking crisis and community support to unprecedented levels. This has helped Ediblelinks secure a number of successful external funding bids, and presented the opportunity to support evermore community groups who in turn are addressing cross cutting activities across all age groups tackling financial inclusion, social isolation and health benefits.

In addition, the opportunities with Ocado are not just centred on food but also supporting people into local employment where normal recruitment would not have taken place, delivering road safety initiatives and wider community sports activities all at no cost to the Council and its partners.

Grown over the last six years, Ediblelinks now helps thousands of people in different ways across North Warwickshire and beyond. Having operated on limited funding until recently, it has always relied on significant commitment, goodwill and trust to succeed from a wide range of partners and has created a truly “can do” environment.

This has seen the project not just deliver life changing outcomes but in 2018 attract the significant levels of funding that will make the project sustainable for at least 3 years and one seen by the National Lottery and via the external awards and very positive coverage received as ground breaking, innovative and delivering best practice in its work across the public, private and third sector.

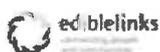
This is because it has gone far beyond its original ambitions of supporting families and individuals impacted by welfare reforms with emergency food parcels to one that undertakes cross cutting and outcome focussed work, much beyond our immediate control. It has been driven alongside colleagues at the Healthy Living Network and is providing health & well being, educational and social responsibility themes, all core to the delivery of the Councils Community Partnership and Corporate Plan ambitions.

**Reason #1
Ahead of the
curve**

Against a backdrop of cuts, we have made a collective commitment to invest in the unknown.

We have focused on community engagement and increasing resilience to deliver holistic bespoke solutions.

This project has provided a wide variety of opportunities for individuals and communities as a whole.



Improved outcomes at less cost

Our primary objective is to help individuals improve their lives across the age and demographic range - from enhancing the start of the school day with breakfast for children through to lunch and support groups for the elderly, and to build community resilience by using food as a catalyst. We are achieving this with an innovative, collaborative delivery model using food supplied at no cost which is saving organisations money and/or enabling them to exist and do "more with less".

The operation supports an ever increasing number of local community groups and schools and in 2018, used 423 tonnes of Ocado support split 85/15 between supporting community groups/schools and food bank clients.

Currently, 175 different community partners and initiatives/projects are being supported that range from voluntary and social enterprise groups, honesty shops, night shelters, children centres, youth activities, homelessness charities, job clubs as well as health programmes to address key local JSNA priorities and that support the National Health Screening programme #onething.

From case studies and testimonials, we can clearly evidence significant impact around crisis prevention, improvements in school results and attendance, well being and engagement whilst building resilience against unavoidable crisis. This is helping us achieve increased upper quartile results in collecting money due to the Council in spite of deprivation, engagement with hard to reach groups and is increasingly supporting customers in a holistic, proactive way

Annual – 2018

Area	Number	Weight in Kg
North Warwickshire Groups	108	167, 789 kg
Nuneaton & Bedworth Groups	52	152, 904 kg
Other	15	36,800kg
TOTAL	175	357,493 kg

The project also supports 42 local schools to deliver breakfast clubs feeding over 650 school children every day as well as holiday, after school & other related activities. Outcomes demonstrated include improved attendance, social inclusion, exam results and increased parent engagement. The support is also raising aspirations and our schools are learning/sharing their experiences widely promoting evermore collaborative opportunities...

School Breakdown

Area	No of schools
North Warwickshire	15
Nuneaton & Bedworth	20
Other	7

Crisis Support

The project continues to support people who engage positively with the Council and our financial inclusion partners with emergency supplies being used to incentivise addressing debt, finding work, bridging the gap created by Universal Credit delays as well as meeting health challenges and addressing child poverty. Without this targeted support, the ability of residents to cope with their crisis would have been significantly worse and has enabled us to maintain our already good Council Tax and Rent collection in spite of austerity challenges.

Food is acting as a very positive way of engaging with hard to reach customers, whilst supporting wider health, and employment outcomes very successfully. These are promoted via daily social media postings which have been very successful in raising awareness of positive activity and showcasing our approach. The crisis food engagement model assessed via a structured customer referral form has been held up as National best practice.

	TOTAL	INCREASE
No. Vouchers	1893	41%
Adult	2806	48%
Children	2300	46%

The Christmas Eve collection of excess turkey and vegetables enabled us to provide 327 festive hampers, helping veterans as part of our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant, and key vulnerable clients. We were also able to support a growing number of Christmas community meals and events addressing social isolation and loneliness, across the whole of the region which again resulted in very positive publicity both on social media and in the press



In summary, the Ocado 'tailored' donations to these groups are invaluable in bringing communities together and enabling activities to happen that address our corporate and partnership priorities in such a positive way.

Success Breeds Success

In December 2018, the innovation and importance of the work of the Council and Ediblelinks was featured as a National case study by the Money Advice Service publication "Supportive Council Tax Recovery". This promoted our proactive approach that is delivering tailored solutions to debt recovery and is built around our in house developed customer referral form, an intuitive on line form offering help and advice that is now being adopted countywide

Since November 2017, Ediblelinks has won or contributed to winning 7 National Awards, from some of the most respected bodies in Local Government

The project has also made three successful bids for external funding, two from the National Lottery and one the Waste Reduction Partnership totalling £650,000 that will make the project sustainable for the next 3 years and also help address wider corporate/health ambitions around loneliness. This will see the delivery of Honesty Shops and social eating events piloted successfully in the last 12 months expand alongside further targeted activities particularly with schools, and older people. Further funding has been obtained from Public Health, via the Sugar Tax given to the County Council and the project is also the nominated charity of the current Mayor, a key volunteer on the project.

Ediblelinks is also supporting veterans living in the borough in a number of shared food related projects. In October, the work was awarded the Silver Accreditation by the M.O.D in recognition of its work that has built on learning from the Ediblelinks volunteer model that has been so successful in attracting community support/engagement and for moving residents back into, or nearer work.



This is because a very successful bi-product of the project is the volunteer opportunities created which have provided a vital stepping stone for over 40 unemployed people get into work including paid employment in Ediblelinks for 4 previous volunteers because of the lottery funding.

However, the project remains reliant on a very committed volunteer base who contribute over 150 hours per week of unpaid support as well as an increasing level of corporate responsibility input from a growing number of private sector supporters keen to get involved with Ediblelinks. This support has been identified because of very positive publicity on social media, and within local press covering the activities and support being provided.



Ground Breaking Innovation

The project continues to develop, test and learn from new and existing initiatives due to the ever increasing support from Ocado who consider Ediblelinks their flagship project. We are a learning base hosting regular visits from other Councils and charities, are informing the “Feeding Britain” programme and participating in academic research.

Reason #2

A Massive Return on a Small Investment

Over 327 tonnes of food waste redistributed to 145 active community groups, 55 free breakfast and after school clubs and 3,000 emergency parcels / Christmas hamper beneficiaries in 2017 alone ... And increasing!

Outstanding, and in some cases, life-changing and unexpected outcomes being achieved

Social and Financial benefits being realised by “Helping Others, Help Themselves”



One of the key innovations over the last year has been the roll out of over 100 honesty shops across the borough with the aim of being:

1. An engagement tool to secure the participation of the hardest to reach
2. An holistic approach to supporting people with 1-2-1 shopping experiences that discover people’s barriers, issues and co-develop solutions
3. Part of a fundraising strategy for Ediblelinks future sustainability

Testimonials provided by users of the shops are demonstrating both a need for, and preference over traditional foodbanks and they have quickly become a popular and integral part of a wider welfare support offer. This is because they provide dignity for users and a revenue stream that will ensure their future.

Run regularly throughout the borough from a network of key community hub outlets that also support a range of financial, health and digital inclusion support programmes, they have raised income of over £38,000 with our most successful example coordinated by a local special needs school aligned to a community café model we are looking to develop wider. The shops are increasingly working in partnership with other complimentary support services (e.g.) Family Information Service, Warwickshire Fire & Rescue, CAB, the local hospital and continue to receive very positive exposure including a feature on the local BBC news

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-41178671/honesty-shop-opens-in-nuneaton>

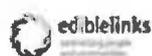
Ediblelinks represents a rich learning opportunity that is addressing cross cutting challenges in a totally unique way. It is trying previously untested and unique ways of working and providing solutions to complex problems via sharing knowledge across our financial inclusion partnership and influencing positive behaviours and both quantifiable and qualitative outcomes.

Reason #3 A Proven Model That Works

What began with singular emotions has grown into something special, unique and ground breaking.

A shared "can do" identity recognised for making the difference in supporting schools, communities, the third sector, and other Councils.

Ediblelinks is the catalyst for delivering cross cutting opportunities and added value with sustainability at its heart.



Sustainability remains fundamental and has been being achieved through the imaginative use of resources and sources of funding that the project has been able to access by taking its collaborative approach. Over time, this will see a membership programme for beneficiaries being developed based on our learning and feedback to date that is providing an ever increasing insight into the value of the project in supporting our residents in a positive way, incentivising engagement and using food as a tool that is helping us identify problems that need to be addressed. These outcomes are largely attributed to the project adopting a non-judgemental and inclusive approach to supporting users.

Whilst providing emergency parcels is essential, access to food through groups, schools and partners has delivered stepped change in engaging positively with residents, bridged funding gaps, changed public perceptions as well as local mind sets to problem solving and is enabling us to achieve wider corporate partnership ambitions.

The food provision is bringing communities together with a common purpose and we are able to provide many case studies around a range of issues including breaking dependency cycles, addressing crisis need and improving health outcomes. This has been achieved by targeting support to address key corporate priorities using a number of different partner front doors created by the Ediblelinks collaboration.

In summary, Ediblelinks is proof of what can be delivered working alongside like minded partners committed to putting the customer at the heart of solutions enabling it to deliver incredible outcomes. We hope you agree.

“Ediblelinks” - A Winning Combination

- A Unique and Ground Breaking Partnership
- Proactive in identifying solutions to problems
- Promoting Joined Up delivery across Sectors via multiple front doors
- Working with customers to deliver personalised solutions to change lives
- Delivering Unprecedented Results on a Shoestring



Money Advice Service Case study “Supportive Council Tax Recovery” – December 2018

North Warwickshire Financial Inclusion Partnership – ‘Helping Others to Help Themselves’

North Warwickshire Borough Council (NW) is an authority of above average deprivation. The largest town is Atherstone and the area is mostly rural, deriving from several former mining communities but is now home to some of the largest logistic operations in the country

Money Advice Service statistics estimate that North Warwickshire has a circa population of **63,000** with **14.2 %** considered to be over indebted.

Despite these challenges, in 2016-2017 the council collected **98.6%** of Council Tax due whilst reducing arrears for previous years by **39%**. The council has also collected **98.7%** of housing rents due. These results were achieved by collecting monies with a supportive approach that actively involves promoting financial inclusion, and third sector partnerships. The Council has been acknowledged for its progressive approach by retaining the Public-Sector Collections Team of the Year award at the Collection and Customer Service awards for a second year running in November and at the same ceremony its Food Hub delivered in partnership with Ocado and a local charity won the Charitable Initiative of the year.

A key outcome achieved by this progressive approach has seen the NW issuing almost 60% less cases to its external civil enforcement agents (bailiffs) in 2017/18 compared to the corresponding period in 2016/17 as well as less summonses for non payment overall

The NW Food Hub via ‘The Healthy Living Network’

A particular feature of the NW approach is its development of a Food Hub to support its work that went live in 2013 as an alternative provision to former social fund payments. A local partnership was established with Ocado, the on-line supermarket which has grown steadily. In April 2017, the success of the partnership saw them donate two refrigerated vehicles to the project funded through the plastic bag tax. The vehicles are not only allowing ever better quality emergency food parcels to be made up for residents in financial difficulty but has allowed 233 tonnes of support to be provided to up to 150 community groups and schools in the area using food that otherwise may have been sent to landfill.

Operating under the collective name of ‘Ediblelinks’, the operation supports the Councils most hard to reach residents and has had the very positive outcome of increasing engagement with the council. People in financial difficulty are supported in their own community or provided with emergency food parcels as a way of delivering corporate ambitions of helping others help themselves. In return residents are encouraged to engage with support such as:

- Debt and welfare advice,
- Employment advice
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Programmes to improve confidence in digital skills which enables residents to save money on utility bills and increase their income.

This support is widely promoted in the Councils residents magazine delivered to every household which also provides information on how to access help and support directly or via trusted partner made easy using a locally developed common referral form (CRF) accessible on line

Help and support from 'Partner agencies'

Residents can access third party support via several different ways. They can complete the 'Help with Money and debt' CRF at home, at ICT hubs in the community or via their mobile phone. Completion of the form authorises a seven-day food supply with no further obligations but further support requires more information. Residents can select appropriate issues and remove irrelevant fields. The questionnaire includes the option of a basic income and expenditure form, a Discretionary Housing Payment form and the ability to refer residents to over 20 partner organisations via one simple form.

The electronic forms are picked up by NW council's triage team who electronically refer the resident to an appropriate partner agencies including NW Citizens Advice, Coventry Mind and Rethink Mental Illness amongst others.

Referral partners will then receive the details, telephone the resident and offer appropriate support.

Since the CRF went live in August 2017, **33%** of those helped by the food hub have also engaged with support from partner organisations and case studies show positive outcomes with people improving their life chances.

Resident affordability

NW Council support financial statements from the advice sector including those based on the new Standard Financial Statement (SFS). The council is also exploring aligning all internal income and expenditure forms, (including the I&E used in the electronic questionnaire) to match the spending categories of the SFS.

As a key partner, Carol Musgrave, Chief Executive of North Warwickshire Citizens Advice said

'We have been part of North Warwickshire's vibrant and innovative Financial Inclusion Partnership since its inception. We are all committed to joining up our efforts to achieve the best outcomes for clients who are often in very difficult circumstances. We have good access to council colleagues and speedy access to food support and work together to solve problems and promote our preventative messages.'



Money Advice Service Case study “Supportive Council Tax Recovery” – December 2018

North Warwickshire Financial Inclusion Partnership – ‘Helping Others to Help Themselves’

North Warwickshire Borough Council (NW) is an authority of above average deprivation. The largest town is Atherstone and the area is mostly rural, deriving from several former mining communities but is now home to some of the largest logistic operations in the country

Money Advice Service statistics estimate that North Warwickshire has a circa population of **63,000** with **14.2 %** considered to be over indebted.

Despite these challenges, in 2016-2017 the council collected **98.6%** of Council Tax due whilst reducing arrears for previous years by **39%**. The council has also collected **98.7%** of housing rents due. These results were achieved by collecting monies with a supportive approach that actively involves promoting financial inclusion, and third sector partnerships. The Council has been acknowledged for its progressive approach by retaining the Public-Sector Collections Team of the Year award at the Collection and Customer Service awards for a second year running in November and at the same ceremony its Food Hub delivered in partnership with Ocado and a local charity won the Charitable Initiative of the year.

A key outcome achieved by this progressive approach has seen the NW issuing almost 60% less cases to its external civil enforcement agents (bailiffs) in 2017/18 compared to the corresponding period in 2016/17 as well as less summonses for non payment overall

The NW Food Hub via ‘The Healthy Living Network’

A particular feature of the NW approach is its development of a Food Hub to support its work that went live in 2013 as an alternative provision to former social fund payments. A local partnership was established with Ocado, the on-line supermarket which has grown steadily. In April 2017, the success of the partnership saw them donate two refrigerated vehicles to the project funded through the plastic bag tax. The vehicles are not only allowing ever better quality emergency food parcels to be made up for residents in financial difficulty but has allowed 233 tonnes of support to be provided to up to 150 community groups and schools in the area using food that otherwise may have been sent to landfill.

Operating under the collective name of ‘Ediblelinks’, the operation supports the Councils most hard to reach residents and has had the very positive outcome of increasing engagement with the council. People in financial difficulty are supported in their own community or provided with emergency food parcels as a way of delivering corporate ambitions of helping others help themselves. In return residents are encouraged to engage with support such as:

- Debt and welfare advice,
- Employment advice
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Programmes to improve confidence in digital skills which enables residents to save money on utility bills and increase their income.

This support is widely promoted in the Councils residents magazine delivered to every household which also provides information on how to access help and support directly or via trusted partner made easy using a locally developed common referral form (CRF) accessible on line

Help and support from 'Partner agencies'

Residents can access third party support via several different ways. They can complete the 'Help with Money and debt' CRF at home, at ICT hubs in the community or via their mobile phone. Completion of the form authorises a seven-day food supply with no further obligations but further support requires more information. Residents can select appropriate issues and remove irrelevant fields. The questionnaire includes the option of a basic income and expenditure form, a Discretionary Housing Payment form and the ability to refer residents to over 20 partner organisations via one simple form.

The electronic forms are picked up by NW council's triage team who electronically refer the resident to an appropriate partner agencies including NW Citizens Advice, Coventry Mind and Rethink Mental Illness amongst others.

Referral partners will then receive the details, telephone the resident and offer appropriate support.

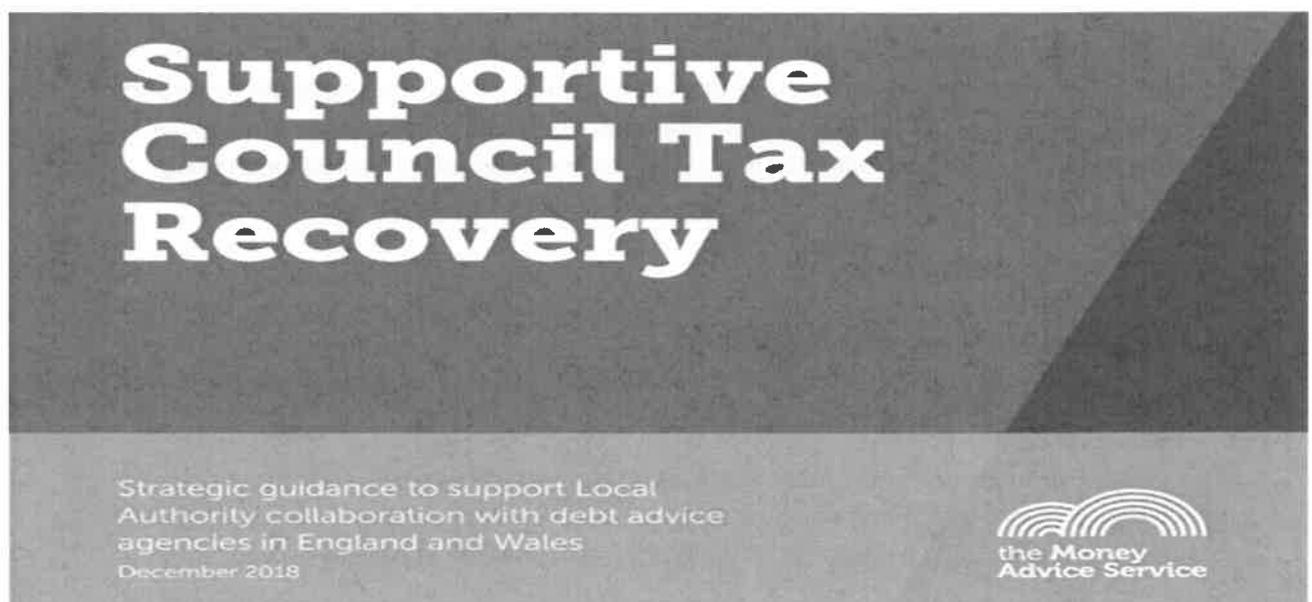
Since the CRF went live in August 2017, **33%** of those helped by the food hub have also engaged with support from partner organisations and case studies show positive outcomes with people improving their life chances.

Resident affordability

NW Council support financial statements from the advice sector including those based on the new Standard Financial Statement (SFS). The council is also exploring aligning all internal income and expenditure forms, (including the I&E used in the electronic questionnaire) to match the spending categories of the SFS.

As a key partner, Carol Musgrave, Chief Executive of North Warwickshire Citizens Advice said

'We have been part of North Warwickshire's vibrant and innovative Financial Inclusion Partnership since its inception. We are all committed to joining up our efforts to achieve the best outcomes for clients who are often in very difficult circumstances. We have good access to council colleagues and speedy access to food support and work together to solve problems and promote our preventative messages.'



Agenda Item No 8

Resources Board

25 March 2019

**Report of the
Chief Executive**

Exclusion of the Public and Press

Recommendation to the Board

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business, on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by Schedule 12A to the Act.

Agenda Item No 9

Irrecoverable Local Taxation Debts – Report of the Corporate Director - Community

Paragraph 1 – by reason of the report containing information relating to an individual

Agenda Item No 10

Community Support Service Delivery – Report of the Director of Housing

Paragraphs 3 & 7 - by reason of the report containing information relating to the business affairs of a person (including the authority holding that information) and information relating to the prevention or investigation of crimes

Agenda Item No 11

Condition of Council Properties – Report of the Director of Housing

Paragraph 3 – by reason of the report containing financial information

Agenda Item No 12

Condition of Council Properties – Report of the Director of Housing

Paragraph 3 – by reason of the report containing financial information

Agenda Item No 13

Land Issues – Further Update – Report of the Director of Streetscape

Paragraph 3 – by reason of the report containing financial and legal information

The Contact Officer for this report is Amanda Tonks (719221)