

<b>7 September 2021</b>		<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Corporate Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Fair Debt Summit – Supporting Vulnerable Residents</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A	
<b>Report of:</b> Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education & Skills		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Michele Lucas Assistant Director Education & Skills		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Children's Services		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

## **Executive Summary**

This report provides an update of the work that was identified as emerging from Fair Debt Summit that was held in September 2018. The summit was a joint initiative between Children's Services and Finance to consider how we tackle some of the challenges that occur when people do not have the appropriate skills to develop strong financial management as they enter life after full time education

The summit was divided into two sections; one looking at young people's understanding around managing finances. The second part of the summit recognised the need for a holistic look at debt within the wider communities. Debt remains one of the most difficult issues that vulnerable local residents face and we took the opportunity to explore how we could jointly develop some key principles around how we support residents to overcome and foresee the burden of debt.

This report will focus on the first section of the summit which was related to supporting schools and colleges with money management programmes to support a greater understanding of financial literacy among young people in Thurrock. An action plan was developed and one of the key priorities was to '*Have in Place an Effective Debt Education Programme*'.

### **1. Recommendations:**

#### **The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to:**

- 1.1 Review the approach, and provide any relevant feedback, with a view of supporting a joint working approach between Finance and Education to provide holistic opportunities to address debt management/avoidance in schools.**

- 1.2 Recommend to Cabinet the continuing support for financial literacy to remain a key focus of the curriculum offer across schools and colleges.**
- 1.3 Recommend the debt management activities continue to be delivered across directorates, as well as making use of external agencies/services to support this programme of activity.**

## **2 Introduction and Background.**

- 2.1 In September 2018 Thurrock Council hosted its first Debt Summit. The event brought together members from each political party, schools and colleges and people from local organisations across both the public and voluntary sectors. The summit explored the reasons people get into debt, the consequences, and how the support we and our partners provide can be improved for people who 'want to pay, but can't'.
- 2.2 The Fair Debt Summit built on the internal and independent external reviews of the council's debt service to provide a framework of good practice, an assessment of the current service, and a rich source of ideas and suggestions on how processes can continue to improve.
- 2.3 One of the key development opportunities related to how we can ensure a more integrated approach to supporting local people and clearly education has an important role to play in ensuring that we have a more holistic approach to addressing what is a very complex picture.
- 2.4 We also recognise the importance of ensuring that local residents can access a range of different services within the council and are building on the work that has been undertaken by both the local area co-ordinators and other members of the community to provide assistance to young people and the wider community.

## **3 What has been achieved?**

- 3.1 A money management programme was developed by Thurrock Adult Community College (TACC) to support both young people and the wider communities across Thurrock. This programme was presented to the 11-19 Strategy Group for comment and feedback. We then went on to pilot this with two schools. The feedback was positive and an evaluation of the programme was produced - see Appendix.
- 3.2 Building on the support for our care leavers which has placed a council tax exemption for all care leavers up to the age of 21 and where special circumstances exist this can be extended to 25, these form part of a number of vulnerable groups. We have also imbedded financial literacy into our successful On Track Programme which is working with unemployed young people aged 16-24.

## **Current position**

- 3.3 With the global pandemic and the national lockdown we had to put further development work on hold. As we begin to come out of the pandemic we can once again consider how we continue with this work going forward. The Inspire Skills Team have a number of both local and national programmes that we are engaging with. An example of this, the Careers Enterprise Company, is providing funding for the Inspire Team to work with schools around the careers curriculum and we are planning to discuss how we can further imbed financial literacy into this work.
- 3.4 We are looking at a Thurrock's Next Top Boss programme to identify a way in which the Local Authority could set a challenge for schools as to how we can develop a more sustainable way of delivering financial literacy given the current budget challenges of both the LA, schools and colleges.

## **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

As we continue on the recovery phase after the covid pandemic as a Local Authority, we are committed to ensuring that we can support both young people and the wider community with a range of ways in which we can further imbed and support financial literacy going forward.

## **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

Fair Debt Summit September 2018 – attendees included partners from the local education sector, and whose feedback has been adopted as part of the approach presented to members.

## **6. Impact on Corporate Policies, Priorities, Performance and Community Impact**

- 6.1 This report contributes to the following corporate priorities:
- create a great place for learning and opportunity.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Finance**

Implications verified by: **David May**  
**Strategic Lead, Finance**

This forms part of the work that was outlined in the debt summit to support young people with the tools around financial management. The COVID pandemic is likely to put more pressure on all communities, and how we support young people in this over the coming academic year will be important.

## 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**  
**Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)**

There are no legal implications within this report.

## 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer, Adults, Housing & Health**

Supporting our local residents is a key strategic priority for Thurrock Council, we ensure that we can utilise our powers to positively support local residents around managing debt and enabling them to access educational opportunities to keep them financially healthy.

## 7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental

None

## 8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

None.

## 9. Appendices to the Report

Appendix 1 – Evaluation of the Programme

### Report Author:

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