



Report of: Communities and Environment – Inner and Outer N/E Community Hub Manager

Report to: Inner North East Community Committee – Chapel Allerton, Moortown and Roundhay

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To Note

Subject: North Leeds Debt Forum – Financial Inclusion and Christmas Spending

Summary of main issues

The report aims to highlight the work of the North Leeds Debt forum and its partners. More specifically to outline the three main strands of work that form the focus of the group

Recommendations

The Inner North East Community Committee is asked to note the content of this report, and to make recommendations around how the North Leeds Debt Forum can take the work of the group forward.

Facilitated workshops will take place during the committee to capture additional ideas, amends and support from the public and other partners.

1.0 Purpose of this report

Background information

- 1.1. The north Leeds Debt Forum has been in existence for just over six months and is the fourth Forum in the city. There are other forums in East, West/North West and South. The debt forums meet on a monthly basis with each having their own local focus. A joint debt forum meeting occurs every quarter to plan coordinated activity where appropriate and make provision for the annual conference in Sep/Oct.

- 1.2. The North Debt forum is organised and chaired by Leeds City council (Community Hubs) and consists of a number of active partners. Those partners are:

Chapelton CAB, Credit Union, Connect Well, Food banks, Street Games, Leeds University, Feel Good Factor, Unity, Touchstone, financial Inclusion Team, Area officers and ward members. The group has an open membership and encourages collaborative activity.

- 1.3. Examples of previous Debt forum work include: Stop Loan Shark Campaigns, significant area distribution networks, and area events organised with aim of breaking the chain of debt,

2. Main Issues

- 2.1. The work of the North Leeds Debt Forum is still in its infancy but significant inroads have been made into developing three main strands of work. The group undertook an outcomes based accountability methodology in order to set these out, they are as below:

- 2.2. **Strand 1: Debt and health**

The debt and health strand has been given a specific focus because of the difficulty professionals can often experience in successfully navigating an appropriate referral. There can be marginal differences between eligibility and the support on offer which can cause confusion and reluctance to refer due to lack of understanding or inappropriate referral.

Activities: The forum has set about creating a single resource for healthcare professionals detailing where and who to refer/signpost patients when they present with debt issues.

How will this make a difference?

- It will equip front line health care professionals to assess and refer appropriately and effectively.
- It will provide greater awareness of the benefits of Credit Unions and responsibly lending. This will ultimately lead to an increase in memberships.
- It will provide an increased awareness of available welfare benefits will improve household incomes.
- It will provide an improved awareness of the range of financial and debt advice services provided throughout the city, and will help to decrease the numbers of people in poverty and living with debt.
- It will provide an improved financial capability and awareness which will contribute to improved health and wellbeing.

- It will contribute to reduced numbers of patients repeat presenting to GP surgeries suffering from symptoms caused by the wider determinants of health

2.3. **Strand 2: Negative Xmas Spending behaviours**

2.4. Families face increased pressure from a variety of sources to spend beyond their means in the run up to and during the Xmas period. They can often find themselves in significant debt which they struggle to finance in the New Year.

2.5. It has become the norm to borrow and spend beyond means. There are social pressures to 'keep up with the joneses', peer power is also a significant factor – research by Leeds University shows that people identify Xmas as a time to spend with family, but that an ability to spend and provide gifts is seen as caring for loved ones.

2.6. Activities - The North Leeds Debt Forum will undertake a series of assertive outreach sessions with a focus on neighbourhood areas within the I/N.E area including: Beckhills, Scott Hall Road and Scholebrooks, Reginalds and Mexboroughs, Granges and Hamiltons: These particular areas are in the top 10% most deprived nationally and are in the top 1% in Leeds. The average populations of these particular areas that are classed as income deprived ranges from 33.8% up to 43%. They also rank in the most employment deprived areas of Leeds, again being in the top 1% locally and top 10% nationally. On average in these particular areas 28.6 % of people are classed as unemployed.

2.7. Assertive outreach will see agencies as part of the forum come together to door knock in these areas to raise an awareness of financial support available to families, and to take immediate referrals where necessary.

2.8. The outreach will be followed by a large scale City Centre event during October with a focus on educating families about responsible lending, avoiding loan sharks, budgeting for Xmas and general financial literacy. We hope to have a marquee on Briggate/Millennium Square or Dortmund Square availability depending.

2.9. **Strand 3: prevention/early intervention – education in schools**

2.10. In Leeds we understand that providing financial education to our Children Young People (CYP) and parents will contribute toward reducing inequalities families may experience. Education at a younger age and with key influencers will help to provide the foundations for better financial habits in later life.

2.11. Financial worries take many guises, from understanding how to make a first pay packet go further, to knowing which broadband provider is offering the best deal or even the price difference between branded products in a packed lunch to supermarket own labels. Debt and financial exclusion has a wide ranging impact on the social determinants of CYP.

Activities: The debt forum has already developed several lesson plans – ‘finding the best deals’, ‘Good Debt Vs. Bad debt’, ‘Budgeting’, and ‘scams and gambling’.

We want to provide schools based work with classroom support, drop in sessions and classroom resources all supported by members of the debt forum.

We will work with Carr Manor High school initially and deliver to age 13/14 & 15/16 yrs (year 9 upwards). Immediate evidence of the need to focus on these ages includes – that the average debt to income ratio for 17-24 year olds now stands at 70%, and that those aged 18-24 represent over 20% of the over – indebted population of the UK.

3. Recommendations

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