

NEWS RELEASE



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Date: 24 January 2022
Issued by: CEM Team

Issue No: 12/22
Version: 0.1

HAVE YOUR SAY ON DRAFT ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY FOR WOKINGHAM BOROUGH

Wokingham Borough Council, together with the local voluntary sector, is asking for residents' feedback on its draft Anti-Poverty Strategy (2022-26), which is set to be published later this Spring.

The draft strategy has been developed in partnership with the Hardship Alliance, a group of four local charities, First Days, Citizens Advice Wokingham, AgeUK Berkshire and Wokingham United Charities; with core objectives of prevention, supporting people in poverty, strengthening communities in their resilience to poverty and improving life opportunities for people living in poverty.

Now, the council is asking for people who live or work in Wokingham Borough to give their thoughts on the draft strategy, including its objectives and first year action plan. Respondents are also encouraged to share their thoughts on anything that they feel might be missing. The [consultation survey](#) is running until 11.59pm on Monday 21 February. Views of Town & Parish Councils, voluntary sector organisations and professionals supporting people who face financial hardship are also welcomed.

John Halsall, Leader of the Council, said: "Last year, we set out our plans to launch an Anti-Poverty Strategy in 2022 and we conducted early engagement to understand more about the issues that matter to our residents. We've met frequently with the Hardship Alliance to ensure we are focussing on the right areas, and drawn upon the expertise of key teams in the council who work closely with the communities that are hit the hardest. This isn't about quick fixes – we want our strategy to deliver long-term changes that make a real difference to our residents, and that's why we're asking for feedback."

The strategy will be underpinned by an annual action plan to address the immediate impacts felt by residents, and to ultimately move more people out of poverty. The draft first-year action plan covers aspects such as communications, employment support, mental health, housing and more. It will be reviewed and refreshed by the council and Hardship Alliance each year to ensure it remains relevant,

builds on actions from previous years and is able to develop innovative and personalised solutions to address challenges faced by people in the borough.

Cllr Laura Blumenthal, deputy executive member for anti-poverty, said: “The council and the local voluntary sector work extremely hard to help people during difficult times; from support with housing and energy efficiency, to access to food and other essential goods. But we recognise that more needs to be done.

“By putting in place a clear action plan and holding accountability, we’re demonstrating our commitment to tackling poverty in Wokingham Borough. We are continuing to gather knowledge and information to inform the annual action plans, and we want to hear from our residents on whether they feel we’re focussing on the right areas, so we can build upon the support that’s already out there, tackle key issues, and ensure fair and equal opportunities for all.”

Amy Garstang, Manager at Wokingham United Charities, said: “We are very excited to be partnering with Wokingham Borough Council and the wider Voluntary Community Sector on this initiative. The Hardship Alliance has been formed to represent the voices of the wider Voluntary Community Sector, and ensure that the Council’s Anti-Poverty strategy is community-led, both now and in the future. The initiative hopes to build a strong communication network between the wider voluntary sector and the local authority.

“Working together, we hope to drive changes that make real differences to those suffering hardship and poverty in Wokingham Borough. Wokingham is fortunate to have many passionate charities and community groups that already provide assistance and support, and it’s vitally important that we represent the ideas and feelings not only of those organisations providing the support, but of the residents of Wokingham. Help us to help you.”

The [consultation](#) is open until 11.59pm on Monday 21 February and is running on the council’s new engagement platform, engage.wokingham.gov.uk. For anyone needing help with the survey, please contact the council by calling 0118 974 6000.

There is already a great deal of information and support available to residents in Wokingham Borough. Please visit the council’s [Local Support Hub](#) for advice on issues such as welfare benefits, debt, housing, relationship problems, mental health, unemployment and more. You can also contact the One Front

Door via its [website](#), or by calling [0808 278 7958](tel:08082787958). The team can connect you with the right support; whether that's at the council, or across our local voluntary sector.

- ENDS -

Further information:

1. More from the Council's Communications, Engagement and Marketing team on CEM@wokingham.gov.uk