

Furniture Poverty
New / Recycling White Goods and Furniture Scheme
Proposal Report

1.0. Introduction and Purpose.

- 1.1. The purpose of this summary report is to explore the plausibility of creating a Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) furniture and white goods provision scheme in Chorley. This would benefit residents that are experiencing Financial Hardship and Furniture Poverty through the current cost of living challenges. More comprehensive information about this can be found in **(Appendix 1)**.
- 1.2. The above issues first came to light in Chorley throughout the COVID Lockdowns, whereby numerous residents were requesting assistance to get new furniture and white goods and to date, no real adequate help has been available to properly address this issue.
- 1.3. In early 2021, Chorley Council's Emergency Assistance Grant, offered a very limited short-term solution, but it greatly helped the majority of the 70+ applicants who were able to buy new white goods and some new furniture with it. Furthermore, it also improved their quality of life at the time, which can be seen in points 8.0 - 11.4 (Emergency Assistance Grant Section) of the Financial Hardship Report 2021 – 2022 and Appendix 1 of the report. [Financial Hardship Report 2021 - 2022](#)

2.0. What Is Furniture Poverty?

- 2.1. On a national level, extensive research has been carried out by a third sector organisation called 'End Furniture Poverty' <https://endfurniturepoverty.org/> which is the campaigning and social research arm of FRC Group <https://frcgroup.co.uk/>; who for the last 30 years, have been providing furniture, both new and preloved, to people in other parts of the country that are living in Furniture Poverty.
- 2.2. End of Furniture Poverty Group defines 'Furniture Poverty' (including white goods), as the inability to access, or afford to buy or maintain, any household furniture or appliance item, that is essential to achieve a socially acceptable standard of living. They state that the impact of having no furniture and white goods can be devastating and detrimental in terms of social isolation, normal life function and finances.
- 2.3. Furthermore, they claim that additional funding provided by Government over the past 3 years, while welcomed, was redirected by the vast majority of local authorities to third party and community sector organisations, such as foodbanks; and a sizeable proportion appears to have been used to fund Free School Meals – leaving furniture provision severely neglected.
- 2.4. As the numbers claiming Universal Credit have doubled in some parts of the country, many more people struggle to replace broken appliances or buy a bed for their child. For those people escaping homelessness, or fleeing domestic violence and care leavers, who often have nothing, welfare schemes are a vital lifeline to prevent severe hardship and destitution.

- 2.5. End Furniture Poverty asked the Government to provide guidance to local authorities to ensure that at least 65% of LWA is used to provide furniture and white goods and to ensure that local authorities properly advertise the schemes, making them easily accessible on their websites. End Furniture Poverty believe that a long-term ring-fenced funding commitment will provide local authorities with the certainty they need to expand on existing schemes or, in those areas without a scheme, create one – and ensure the funding is not diverted to prop up other frontline services.

3.0. Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) Furniture and White Goods Services in Chorley,

- 3.1. Although there are no LWA's currently operating in Chorley, there are a couple of services that are worthy of note, operating in nearby authorities. They are Lancashire County Council (LCC) commissioned Social Enterprise Network (SELNET based in Preston) to deliver a Essential Household Goods Support Scheme and The Brick from Wigan, a multi-faceted third sector charity, who would like to expand their business / service into Chorley.
- 3.2. SELNET operate under the brand 'Under One Roof', which provides support for residents who need help to maintain or establish a home. The overall aim of this service is to support people to meet their immediate needs and to help them feel more secure and live more independently in the community. <https://selnet-uk.com/selnet-under-one-roof/>
- 3.3. The Brick Project offers numerous services to people who are homeless, in poverty or facing debt crisis; such as, an intervention service, debt advice support, food poverty, homelessness and housing support to name but a few. All other services will be highlighted in **(Appendix 1)**. <https://www.thebrick.org.uk/>
- 3.4. The recently launched 'Brick by Brick Project' deals with the cost of living crisis and will be a community donations hub, whereby Amazon and other companies can donate a wide range of surplus products and reach people directly through a network of charity groups and care professionals in the community including teachers, midwives and social workers.
- 3.5. The project will bring together the knowledge and network of The Brick, other local charities, and the logistics expertise and donations from Amazon. Further to this, they will receive product donations from other national and local retailers, to provide the right products at the right time. The project will provide an offer that meets the needs of families in the area, which includes essential items like bedding, toiletries, nappies, wipes, clothing, backpacks, home furnishings, lightings, and electrical products.
- 3.6. Furthermore, Amazon helped set-up the warehouse operations at the Brick-by-Brick Project site in Wigan with a contribution of pro-bono staffing, operations advice, and an initial cash grant of £100,000 to support the recruitment, salaries, and training of the team.
- 3.7. The Brick want to expand their service to Chorley and would use volunteers from Chorley in the process. To make this happen, they need a suitable sized storage facility (free of charge if possible), to store furniture and other household items; and further to this, they would like to partner with an established organisation from Chorley, that provides a similar type of service to their own. Chorley Buddies and Living Waters have recently expressed an interest in partnering with the Brick concerning the Brick by Brick Project.

3.8. More detailed information about SELNET and the Brick is captured in **(Appendix 1)**.

4.0. Findings / Conclusions

- 4.1. It is clear from the research carried out by the charity 'End Furniture Poverty', that there is an ongoing long-term national problem concerning Furniture Poverty. The regular ongoing Furniture Poverty enquiries to Chorley Council would support this assertion and this problem could be dealt with via targeted partnership intervention work via public, private and third sector services.
- 4.2. In terms of SELNET, it is quite difficult to access the scheme and it has a restricted budget and a small team to deliver it. The scheme mainly focuses on 12 Lancashire districts which makes it more diluted and reduces the opportunities for Chorley residents to access it.
- 4.3. With regards to the Brick, they have an excellent track record in this area of work and are keen to work in Chorley. They would offer an excellent and more expansive alternative, that could compliment the work of SELNET and fill any gaps of their more limited Furniture Poverty provision. This would create an increased local offer of support for Chorley residents.

5.0. Recommendations / Way Forward.

- 5.1. It is proposed that Chorley Council via its Communities Team, should play a key role in facilitating / coordinating any future partnership work between the Brick Project and Chorley Buddies and or Living Waters. This would bring much needed support to the borough and is something that would be of great benefit to Chorley residents. This could be in the form of a 12-month pilot scheme.
- 5.2. The above could include Chorley Council finding or providing a suitable building / base, free of charge for 12 months; such as an appropriately sized vacant shop in Chorley Town Centre, or a vacant warehouse close to the town centre.
- 5.3. The project could be monitored and evaluated qualitatively and quantitatively over its' 12 month duration and this could be done by recording the numbers of residents that have accessed the scheme and also via case studies from residents; recording how the scheme has improved their quality of life.
- 5.4. If Chorley Council were to support the above, there would be some financial implications, such as the loss of income and revenue for shop and warehouse letting. Furthermore, there will also be cost implications concerning council officers time, facilitating the partnership work between The Brick and Chorley Buddies and or Living Waters; and also for collating information, for monitoring and evaluation and for producing reports associated with the proposed project.

John Hill
April 2023

Appendix 1

Additional Information Concerning Furniture Poverty

1.0. 'End of Furniture Poverty Charity'

- 1.1. In October 2021, Charity Campaign End Furniture Poverty carried out extensive research into Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) – local authority-run schemes to support people in a time of crisis with grants and providing essential furniture and appliances. It is estimated that over 5 million people in the UK are living without at least one essential household appliance such as a cooker or a fridge freezer. <https://endfurniturepoverty.org/research/understanding-furniture-poverty/>
- 1.2. Research also revealed that someone needing to use a launderette can add approximately £1000 to the annual cost of washing your clothes.
- 1.3. End Furniture Poverty also published The Postcode Lottery of Crisis Support recently and it revealed since 2010, there had been an 86% decline in the amount spent on crisis support and 25 local authorities in England had closed their LWA schemes, leaving one in five people unable to access crisis support.
- 1.4. The picture is very different in the devolved nations where everyone can access a scheme. End Furniture Poverty found that in 2019/20, in England the per capita spend on LWA was just 64p, compared to £4.19 in Wales, £6.79 in Northern Ireland, and £6.88 in Scotland. The summary and full report can be found here <https://endfurniturepoverty.org/research/the-postcode-lottery-of-crisis-support/>
- 1.5. End Furniture Poverty examined the state of LWA provision and the additional support offered during the pandemic. Initial findings suggested that there are now more than 27 local authorities without an LWA scheme in England.
- 1.6. Claire Donovan, Head of Policy at End Furniture Poverty, said: *“Investing in local welfare schemes is not only the right thing to do, it can also create significant savings across the public purse. “Living in furniture poverty has a terrible impact on people’s mental and physical health, leading to increased NHS costs, and it can drive people into unmanageable debt as they try to access high-cost credit, leading to evictions and homelessness.* <https://endfurniturepoverty.org/2021/10/22/press-release-autumn-budget-must-provide-adequate-crisis-support/>
- 1.7. End Furniture Poverty report that The Government provided significant levels of emergency funding for LWA in response to the pandemic, therefore admitting that crisis support was underfunded and inadequate in many parts of the country. But spending deadlines and the lack of infrastructure in areas with a closed local welfare scheme, meant that in too many cases the funding did not reach those who most needed it.

- 1.8. Claire Donavon further explained that *“With the £20 cut to Universal Credit, the end of furlough, rising energy costs and the upcoming increase to National Insurance contributions, millions of people are struggling and while there is widespread support for food and utilities costs, there is little other support for furniture and white goods. “The grant-giving sector do a fantastic job, providing furniture and white goods to applicants, but they cannot shoulder the burden alone – people need properly funded Local Welfare Assistance schemes and we urge the Government do the right thing and make this crucial investment.”*

2.0. SELNET - Further Information

- 2.1. Lancashire County Councils Essential Household Goods Support Scheme is a non-statutory service that provides support for the people of Lancashire. The scheme is now contracted to SELNET for 3 years fixed term and is operating under the brand ‘Under One Roof’, which provides support for residents who need help to maintain or establish a home. The overall aim of this service is to support people to meet their immediate needs and to help them feel more secure and live more independently in the community. <https://selnet-uk.com/selnet-under-one-roof/>
- 2.2. Furthermore, SELNET / Under One Roof has 50 registered partners consisting of private, public and 3rd sector organisations and it is available to people that live in the administrative boundary of Lancashire County Council and operates across the 12 districts of the local authority. Residents from any unitary councils in Lancashire, are not eligible for support in this scheme.
- 2.3. The scheme is managed by a small team of 2 full time staff (including manager) and 2 part time staff and is accessible Monday to Friday 9.00am - 5.00pm (excluding Bank Holidays) and they give advanced warning of any disruption to service delivery. Under One Roof scheme aims to process applicants within 2 working days and aims to get furniture and white goods to applicants, within 10 working days.
- 2.4. SELNET admit that funding for this scheme is small / limited and that they need to apply for additional funding, to help improve the service. They would not disclose the amount of funding they have been allocated and neither would they disclose how much funding would be allocated to Chorley. The scheme is currently dealing with 30 applicants per week and struggles with capacity. As a result, Under One Roof must be used as a last resort only and to access it, an applicant must:
- Be aged 16 years or over
 - Live within the administrative boundary of Lancashire
 - Have no income or be on a low income, such as tested benefits
 - Be a priority group
 - Not have access to sufficient funds to meet their immediate needs or those of their dependents
 - Need to access essential household items to help maintain and establish a home
 - Be referred into the scheme by partner organisations

- 2.5. SELNET / Under One Roof work with re-use / upcycling organisations in Preston for access to good quality second-hand furniture (including beds) and they can also access brand new white goods when required. The scheme, however, cannot be used to purchase new carpets.
- 2.6. If residents are experienced other issues outside of the remit of the scheme, they will be directed to appropriate services to meet their needs.

3.0. The Brick Project - Further Information

- 3.1. The Brick Project in Wigan is a growing charity that offers services to people who are homeless, in poverty or facing debt crisis. As its name suggests, it provides a safe, solid building block for people in crisis to begin to construct a new life and become valuable members of society. The services run by the Brick Project includes a Crisis Intervention Service and Wigan's largest Food Bank. Both are managed by a small staff team but the main support to its service users is delivered by volunteers. <https://www.thebrick.org.uk/>
- 3.2. The Brick also operates statutory tendered projects offering support to people in their tenancies; ensuring people newly homeless, to move quickly into accommodation and ensuring that homeless people receive good health care and support if in hospital. Staff and volunteers at the Brick Project help people tackle the root causes of homelessness such as, debt, poverty and hunger.
- 3.3. Furthermore, it offers a huge range of services to people who are homeless, in poverty or facing debt crisis. This includes Crisis Intervention, Hospital to Home and Asset Coaching <https://www.thebrick.org.uk/project/asset-coaching-and-mentoring>
- 3.4. Other services within the project include the following:
 - [The Brick Shop](#) - is a charity shop selling donated goods, often to people on low incomes. The shop gives clothes free of charge to people referred by Wigan Council. The shop is one of the main hubs within its community
 - [The Brick Works](#) - offers training to increase the employment opportunities for people who are unemployed for a variety of reasons. This may include homelessness or recently housed people referred
 - [The Brick Giving](#) - aims to put an end to poverty and homelessness in Wigan and Leigh. Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, The Brick has faced a reduction in donations and increased demand on its services from people in need. The Brick aim to continue supporting the community to ensure no one gets left behind
 - [The Brick Re-Use](#) - has been set up to help educate people in the Wigan Borough about recycling and re-use. They also turn unwanted goods into lovingly restored furniture for families in need

- 3.5. The Brick are currently in partnership with Wigan Council to provide welfare packages. They are contracted by Wigan Council to provide furniture and furnishings (second hand, except beds / cutlery / pots, pans, duvets and bedding which are all bought in new). The Brick sources stores and delivers all the items to families/individuals who are referred to the scheme. The scheme provides around 10 -15 furniture packages a month to people in need for a range of reasons, such as from fleeing Domestic Violence, to leaving care and moving into their first home, to people who might have lost everything in a fire.
- 3.6. In the above agreement, Wigan Council pay per item, plus a contribution to storage costs and also administration wages. There are no white goods supplied on this contract, but if people need them, they are put on a waiting list and the Brick gets the appliances for the individual who might pay between £30-40 for a cooker.
- 3.7. All the Brick's second-hand furniture and white goods are sourced from public donations and the electrical items are PAT Tested and checked before they are distributed, but they don't do any significant repairs. Any items that aren't reusable are scrapped. The Brick currently have around 30-40 people on a waiting list, as the demand is ever increasing.
- 3.8. The Brick are also contracted by Wigan Council to deliver a project called 'Final Finish' in which they refurbish void properties ready for their next tenancy. They paint, provide and put up blinds / curtains and re-carpet (ranging from flats to 4-bedroom houses) and are currently finishing 200 properties per year. The Brick also provide painting packs for tenants who want to do the work themselves and instructions.
- 3.9. Internal Welfare Packages are delivered by the Brick for people who might not be eligible for council support, for example someone who is moving out of emergency accommodation into supported accommodation. This includes the provision of second-hand stock, free of charge to these residents going through this process. The Brick have successfully procured funding previously from the Homeless Charity 'Crisis', to enable the purchase of brand-new white goods for people at risk of homelessness. Furthermore, they provide up to 5 Internal Welfare Packages per month.
- 3.10. With regards to the 3 retail shops run by the Brick in Wigan and Leigh, they describe them as community hubs which are stocked with pre-loved donated items and is a place where people can access affordable furniture and white goods. Depending on circumstances the Brick will also provide items heavily discounted or free of charge. The Brick are currently providing free books for all children, at all their shops and they are considering running similar schemes for clothes. One of the shops in Wigan specialises in electrical items and white goods.
- 3.11. The Brick provides affordable new white goods and they partner with 'Whirlpool' and can access very cheap white goods, that they store for people who want to pay in instalments. They market this process as a way of encouraging people to avoid payday loans and catalogue shops etc.
- 3.12. All of the above is also providing jobs, training and work experience placements for the 70+ people that the Brick currently support in Wigan and Leigh homeless emergency accommodation.

- 3.13. They have recently opened a new warehouse in Wigan which will enable them to offer more skills and accredited courses in logistics, stock control, fork lift truck driving etc so that they are more equipped to move away from homelessness and into a job and home of their own.
- 3.14. As part of that journey, once they have their property, they can continue to volunteer with the Brick and they can access the furniture welfare too, if they need it. The Brick has 140 volunteers and recently won the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.
- 3.15. The Brick are also a part of the Reuse Network and have just been accredited to be an 'Approved Reuse Centre' (ARC) member which gives them access to returned stocks too from retailers such as Ikea, John Lewis etc, which will then feed back into the above areas.

John Hill
April 2023