



Local anti-poverty strategies

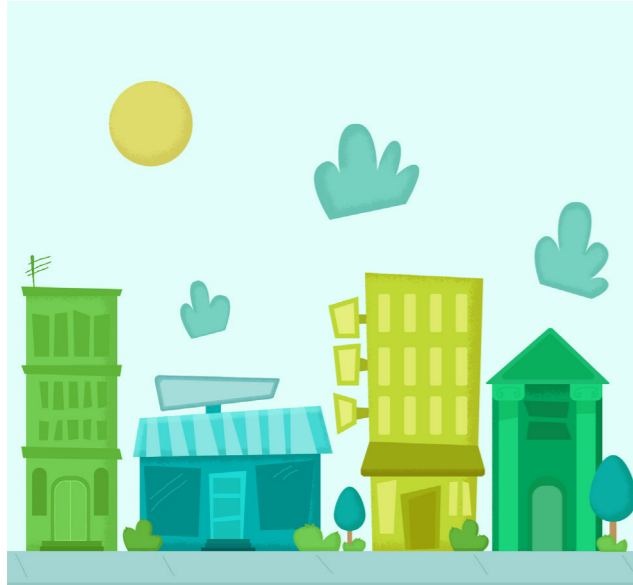
Good practice and effective approaches

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About Greater Manchester Poverty Action

Greater Manchester Poverty Action (GMPA) is a not-for-profit organisation that works to address poverty across Greater Manchester.



Our vision is of a Greater Manchester free from poverty where all residents can realise their potential and access the benefits of living in a diverse and vibrant city region.

We convene and network organisations from public, private and VCSE sectors, and people with lived experience of poverty, to foster collaboration and innovation and to maximise the impact of efforts to address the underlying causes of poverty across Greater Manchester. We equip stakeholders with the knowledge they need to tackle poverty. We carry out research and advocate for changes in policy at a local and city regional level and sometimes at a national level to address the structural and systematic causes of poverty.

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Any errors are the author's own.

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Summary

Left to pick up the pieces by central government failure, local authorities and their partners are facing mounting pressures and demands by communities and services to take the lead to address poverty locally. An absence of statutory guidance, adequate funding, and direction from the government has made this a real challenge. However, in response to significant increases in poverty, a number of local authorities have adopted a strategic approach, developing, and implementing local anti-poverty strategies. The need for a strategic approach at a local level has been sharpened, firstly by the Covid-19 pandemic and more recently by the Cost-of-living Crisis. Instead of being reactive to crisis after crisis, strategic approaches to dealing with poverty prioritise the issue and enable more coherent long-term solutions and approaches to address poverty. Local anti-poverty strategies provide local authorities and partners with greater consistency, close coordination of policy, and a sense of direction to address poverty when carefully planned and implemented.

This research provides insight into the strategic approach local authorities and their partners can take to address poverty and identifies the key elements of a local anti-poverty strategy that will maximise its effectiveness.

Poverty is on the rise, but the UK Government has no plan or strategy to address poverty. Whilst many of the main drivers to tackle poverty lie with central government, the lack of consideration for poverty and its consequences nationally means that action at a local level is more important than ever.

There are examples of good practice and impact from localities where there is a strong policy and strategic focus on addressing poverty, delivered through, and steered by a robust anti-poverty strategy. However, there is a lack of up-to-date research that explores best practice and effective approaches in the design and implementation of local anti-poverty strategies.

This research aims to fill this gap by developing new thinking and valuable insights into the most effective ways to design and implement a local anti-poverty strategy, drawing on existing anti-poverty strategies across the country. The report is a response to growing interest in how localities can respond to poverty, taking more of a preventative approach and moving away from crisis responses towards reducing poverty. In an era of perpetual crisis, the report can enable local authorities, working with their partners, to create a structured and systematic approach to the issue.



Six case studies inform this report: Salford City, Rother District, East Devon District, Cambridge City, Leicester City, and Scottish Borders.

In the report, we identify the key elements of a good anti-poverty strategy, from scope and design to aims and measures of success. The central focus is the creation of a framework for what an effective local anti-poverty strategy should look like to support local authorities and partners to develop and/or improve their strategic approach. The framework is also of relevance to the work of combined authorities.

Framework for an effective local anti-poverty strategy

Based on the findings of our report, Local anti-poverty strategies – Good practice and effective approaches, Greater Manchester Poverty Action (GMPA) has developed a framework that highlights what elements an anti-poverty strategy needs to maximise its impact. This framework is intended to be of use to local authorities seeking to develop or refresh an anti-poverty strategy.

An anti-poverty strategy will only be successful if it is supported by the elements identified in this framework. All these elements are complementary and interdependent.



Define poverty and its drivers

Local authorities need to adopt a relative definition of poverty and identify the drivers of poverty (using appropriate and available metrics).



Political and officer leadership

Active committed leadership on poverty (politically and officially) is required to drive change and coordinate strategic and policy responses.



Focus on prevention, reduction, and mitigation

A medium and long-term perspective is needed that includes actions that prevent and reduce the root causes of poverty.



Prioritisation

Local authorities need to be clear about what the strategy seeks to achieve and how actions will be taken to achieve it.



Partnership working

An anti-poverty strategy requires buy-in from local stakeholders to achieve its aims and objectives.



Lived experience engagement and co-production

An anti-poverty strategy should be developed with people with lived experience of poverty to challenge the existing ways of working and ensure that anti-poverty efforts are centred around the needs of the community.



Reinforcing and aligning with existing strategies

Tackling poverty needs to be incorporated within existing strategies rather than operating as 'ad-hoc' to existing commitments and services.



Governance

Anti-poverty strategies should be subject to both internal and external governance.



Action Plan

Accompanying the anti-poverty strategy should be a high-level action plan detailing who is responsible for the delivery of the actions, timelines, and milestones, and associated outcomes.



Adopting the socio-economic duty

To support the effectiveness of an anti-poverty strategy, local authorities should voluntarily adopt the socio-economic duty.



Adaptability

An anti-poverty strategy cannot "standstill", for it to serve its purpose it should be viewed as adaptable, rather than a collection of actions that should be rigidly adhered to.



Monitoring and evaluation

Local authorities and partners need to identify a clear set of metrics (quantitative and qualitative) against which progress on tackling poverty can be tracked. Working collaboratively to identify data and evidence gaps and addressing these together.

The report is informed by GMPA's work since our formation in 2016 and as a leading advocate for action on poverty at a local, regional, and national level.

Methodology

The report is based on the following:

- Semi-structured interviews with councillors and policy officers from each of the six case study local authorities featured in the report.
- Desk-based research reviewing the anti-poverty strategies of each of the six local authorities.
- A literature review exploring some of the key elements relating to a strategic approach to tackling poverty.
- Two 'expert panel discussions' with 'poverty experts' from across the UK.
- A focus group with people with lived experience of poverty from Greater Manchester.

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Introduction

Background to the research

Poverty in the UK is a significant issue, it is estimated that 1 in 5 of our population (22%) is in poverty - 14.5 million people (Joseph Roundtree Foundation 'JRF' 2022). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Cost-of-living Crisis is accelerating pre-existing trends of poverty and inequality in the UK. Low-income households who are already struggling to make ends meet are hardest hit by the Cost-of-living Crisis as they face higher inflation rates than better-off households. In November 2022, inflation hit 12.5% for low-income households, whereas the richest 10% of households have the lowest rate of inflation at 10% (Resolution Foundation, 2022).

Greater Manchester is home to some of the highest levels of poverty and deprivation in the country and poverty is a major issue in all ten of the boroughs. Our Greater Manchester Poverty Monitor (2022a) highlights there are an estimated 620,000 people, out of a population of 2.8 million, living below the poverty line the city region and around 145,000 children are living in relative poverty (before housing costs). The child poverty rate in the city region is higher than the England and UK average.

Households are facing constant tough spending decisions day in and day out about whether to pay bills, eat or use gas and electricity. The never-ending cycle of struggling to afford the basic necessities

should not be the reality for so many households in Greater Manchester and across the UK. It is not inevitable or necessary.

It has been encouraging to see in Greater Manchester there is a determination to overcome these challenges. Through GMIPA's work and the commitment of local political leaders and other stakeholders, there is a strong desire to address poverty in the city region. It has been positive to see a growth in the ten local authorities showing an interest or developing strategic responses to poverty and policies and practices which address poverty. We have worked with several local authorities on the design, implementation, and development of their anti-poverty strategies.

However, we believe with longstanding, entrenched poverty in the city region being compounded by the Cost-of-living Crisis, this is a watershed moment for local authorities in Greater Manchester and across the country to implement and/or strengthen anti-poverty strategies to ensure that responses to poverty are well-designed, carefully planned and implemented instead of being reactive to crisis after crisis. Without a concerted and committed response, growing poverty will have a devastating impact now and on future generations.

Why does a strategic approach matter?

The national government has no clear plan or strategy to address poverty, there is limited interest in poverty and socio-economic disadvantage. Whilst many of the main drivers to tackle poverty lie with central government, the projected increases in poverty over the next few years mean that action at a local level is more important than ever (Corlett and Try, 2022). However, a common challenge for local public bodies and their voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) and private sector partners is that there is a lack of support or direction as to how they can tackle poverty. Local authorities and other local stakeholders often voice frustrations that their role is often one of crisis response and ‘picking up the pieces’ as result of central government policy failure.

Moreover, a decade of austerity measures, cuts, and reforms to the welfare system, combined with years of savage budget cuts to local authorities and other public services has made addressing poverty increasingly difficult. Central government funding for local authorities fell in real terms by over 50% between 2010-11 and 2020-21 and core resources available to provide services have fallen by 26% in real terms over ten years (Committee of Public Accounts, 2022).

Despite this context, there are examples of good practice and impact from places where there is a strong policy and strategic focus on addressing poverty, delivered through, and steered by a robust anti-poverty strategy. The wide-ranging nature of the areas of policy means that a strategic approach is required to ensure joint working by all local government services and key stakeholders.

A strategic approach provides local public bodies with a clear sense of direction to take action to address poverty. Our findings emphasise that local anti-poverty strategies add value to addressing poverty in three ways:

- Firstly, they set clear objectives and set out how they will be achieved, underpinned by a shared understanding of poverty and its causes.
- Secondly, they improve coordination and empower key local stakeholders to do more to address poverty as there is a coherent framework helping to marshal limited resources and capacity and fostering a collective determination to address the issue across partners.

- Thirdly, they increase accountability for action as they provide measurable targets to understand if the actions set out are making a difference but there is an emphasis on longevity and the ability to learn as the strategy progresses.

This report seeks to capture how local authorities and their partners can take a strategic approach to poverty. This report is informed by GMPA’s work since our formation in 2016 and as a leading advocate for action on poverty at a local, regional, and national level. It is in response to growing interest in the role local authorities can take to address poverty.

It is our hope that this report stimulates further discussions about the role of local authorities and partner organisations in addressing poverty. Most importantly, we hope it encourages local authorities to implement local anti-poverty strategies to address poverty.

Research question

This research sought to answer the following research question:

What is a good anti-poverty strategy and how can local authorities and their partners develop and implement an anti-poverty strategy in a way that maximises its effectiveness?

Aims of research

There is a lack of up-to-date research that explores best practice and effective approaches in the design and implementation of local anti-poverty strategies. This research aims to fill this gap, by developing new thinking and valuable insights about the most effective ways to design and implement a local anti-poverty strategy. This report aims to produce a framework for what an effective local anti-poverty strategy should look like to support local authorities’ and partners to develop and/or improve their strategic approach.

The research had three aims:

- Highlight anti-poverty strategies that are in place across the county that we have identified as being good practice: Salford City, Rother District, East Devon District, Cambridge City, Leicester City and Scottish Borders.
- Identify the key elements of a good local anti-poverty strategy, from scope and design to aims and measures of success.
- Develop a framework for local authorities and partners who are seeking to implement or enhance a local anti-poverty strategy.

Structure of report

This report is structured as follows:

- [Chapter 1](#) presents the national picture of approaches to poverty and previous research on local anti-poverty strategies.
- [Chapter 2](#) outlines the research methods that were used.
- [Chapter 3](#) presents the findings and analysis of the six local anti-poverty strategies.
- [Chapter 4](#) provides an overview of the six local anti-poverty strategies.
- [Chapter 5](#) presents the findings and analysis of the focus group.
- [Chapter 6](#) the final chapter sets out the framework for an effective local anti-poverty strategy.

Literature review - setting the scene

In this chapter, we explore approaches to addressing poverty at a national level and review existing literature on local anti-poverty strategies. There are two principal objectives of the literature review. The first is to assess dominant explanations of what makes a good anti-poverty strategy and to highlight the challenges strategies may face. The second objective of examining the literature is to identify the key elements of a good anti-poverty strategy, which serve to guide the development of the anti-poverty strategy framework and choice of six case studies.

1.1 UK strategies

After two decades of rising inequality, Labour came into office in 1997 committed to reducing child poverty. In 1999, Tony Blair pledged to 'eliminate child poverty in a generation', in 2003, the UK introduced three child poverty indicators and poverty was said to be falling when all three indicators were moving in the "right direction" (DWP, 2003). The indicators were: absolute low income, relative low income and material deprivation and low income combined. In 2010, the Child Poverty Act was passed with cross-party support, this enshrined four child poverty targets to be met by 2020/2021, placed a duty on the UK government to publish a UK child poverty strategy (and the Scottish and Northern Irish Ministers), set up a Child Poverty Commission to advise on strategies and report annually on progress. It also placed duties on local and other "delivery partners" in England to work together to tackle child poverty, conduct a local needs assessment and produce a child poverty strategy (Kennedy, 2014).

In 2016, the Welfare Reform and Work Act repealed the Child Poverty Act, including the four targets, the requirement for UK and local authorities to develop child poverty strategies, and the duty of local authorities to conduct child poverty needs assessments. The Child Poverty Committee became the Social Mobility Committee with responsibilities covering social mobility only.

Since the abolition of the Child Poverty Act, the government is only required to report on children living in workless households and the educational outcomes of children at age 16; there is no specific requirement to report on these metrics for disadvantaged children. However, after prolonged pressure, the government agreed to continue publishing data on the number of children living in poverty.

In addition, successive governments have not brought the socio-economic duty in Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 into force. This imposes a legal duty on public bodies to consider how their decisions increase or decrease inequalities that result from socio-economic disadvantage. The government suggests it has the potential to become a tick-box exercise and is thus unnecessary to implement (State Party Report 2022,p.9). Despite these claims, both Wales and Scotland have brought Section 1 into force and a number of local authorities across the country have voluntarily adopted the duty, where it has been adopted meaningfully it is supporting public bodies in shaping their policies and strategic responses to poverty.

Failure to implement the socio-economic duty is detrimental to delivering better outcomes for those with lived experience of poverty. If the socio-economic duty was enforced, there would be a greater onus on the government to tackle issues affecting people experiencing poverty as they would have to evidence how policies and budget decisions were fair and necessary, and compatible with its international human rights obligations. It is a further illustration of the government not taking socio-economic disadvantage seriously.

Currently, there is no strategic approach to poverty at a national level, the government's response to the Cost-of-living Crisis has been focused on ad-hoc and piece meal policies (i.e., one off pieces of support for families or short-term pots of funding for local councils to deliver support to residents). An absence of statutory guidance and direction from the government to develop a strategic response to poverty has led to a patchwork of measures and approaches across the country.

Devolved nations

The devolved governments have key responsibilities for policy areas that are important to tackle poverty (Lodge, Henderson, & Davies, 2015, p. 5). Currently, Scotland has a higher number of devolved powers than any other UK nation. The varied degree of freedom has resulted in noticeable differences in respect of a strategic approach to tackling poverty. We summarise the approaches of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Scotland

Cairney et al highlight (2017, p.346) 'the Scottish Government has nurtured a reputation for doing policy differently – the "Scottish approach"'. In contrast to the UK's approach, the Scottish Government has elements of a strategic approach to anti-poverty policy (Sinclair, 2022).

Child Poverty (Scotland) Act

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act was passed by the Scottish Parliament in 2017, following the UK government's decision to repeal the Child Poverty Act 2010. The Scottish Government's long-term ambition is to eradicate poverty, but they are acutely aware that many of the necessary levers for change are not devolved.

The Act sets out a direction of travel for tackling, reporting, and measuring child poverty (Scottish Government 2017, p.3). At present, Scotland is the only part of the UK with statutory income targets on child poverty. The Scottish Government recognises that poverty cannot be measured with one single measure, therefore the act sets out four targets all on an after-housing costs (AHC) basis to be achieved by 2030. The targets state:

- Less than 10% should be living in relative poverty
- Less than 5% should be living in absolute poverty
- Less than 5% should be living with combined low income and material deprivation
- Less than 5% should be living in persistent poverty

In full the Act contains the following elements:

- Four statutory income targets for reducing the number of children living in poverty by 2030 with interim targets for 2023 (as detailed above).
- Places a duty on Scottish Ministers to publish Child Poverty Delivery Plans.
- Places a duty on local authorities and regional health boards to publish joint Local Child Poverty Action Reports (LCPARS) annually.
- A Statutory Poverty and Inequality Commission that scrutinises progress towards tackling poverty and inequality.

Child Poverty Delivery Plans

Scottish Ministers are required to publish delivery plans in 2018, 2022 and 2026 and to report annually on these plans. A delivery plan must include the following: measures they intend to take to tackle poverty, their projections on the effectiveness of these measures at meeting the 2030 targets and how they have arrived at these figures and what these measures are anticipated to cost.

Local Child Poverty Action Reports

Local authorities and regional health boards in Scotland are required to provide annual reports describing the work that they are delivering and developing that will contribute to a reduction in child poverty and increase the likelihood of meeting the 2030 national targets. The reports must also describe income maximisation measures taken to support families and pregnant women and for households with one or more members with protected characteristics measures taken to or proposed to be to support households whose income maybe affected.

At a minimum local authorities and health boards must meet the statutory requirements and are encouraged to engage with key local stakeholders. The Scottish Government provides guidance for local authorities and health boards to consider when developing Local Child Poverty Action Reports including involving people with lived experience of poverty and alignment with national delivery plans (Scottish Government, 2018). To support local partners with production of reports, the Scottish Government funds a national co-ordinator based at the Improvement Service, the co-ordinator works with local authorities and health boards sharing best practice, providing information on the support available from national partners and direct feedback on reports (Improvement Service, 2019).

However, it is at the discretion of local partners to identify strategic leadership to coordinate the reports, best policies, and actions to tackle poverty and measures to track progress that are locally feasible (Scottish Government, 2022).

Wales

Wales has a clear policy objective to address poverty and social exclusion and they have initiated a range of initiatives to tackle poverty. In 2010, the Welsh government introduced a duty on Welsh Ministers to develop a child poverty strategy for Wales. The current strategy has five priority areas: childcare, in-work poverty, food poverty, housing, and regeneration and mitigating the impacts of welfare reform. They are currently working to develop a refreshed child poverty strategy this year, after reaffirming their commitment to a whole government approach to tackling poverty that delivers programmes through a poverty lens (Welsh Government, 2022).

Northern Ireland

Since the 1998 Northern Ireland Act, the Executive has been required to have an anti-poverty strategy that sets out *'how it proposes to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need'*. They must keep this strategy under review and update it as needed.

However, in 2015, the Northern Ireland High Court ruled that there was no strategy that met these requirements in existence. Development of an anti-poverty strategy in Northern Ireland is currently ongoing, with a co-design group and cross-departmental working group. The working groups are comprised of voluntary and community and advisory organisation and senior representations across all departments. The key anti-poverty strategy in Northern Ireland is the Child Poverty Strategy, the most recent version covers 2016-22. It commits the government to produce a 'Poverty Outcomes Model' to assess which interventions are most effective in tackling poverty. It is accompanied by an action plan and annual progress reports are published (Northern Ireland Executive, 2016). The strategy has two key aims: to reduce the number of children who live in poverty and to reduce the impact living in poverty has on children's lives and life chances.

Literature review

Before we present a review of the literature, it is worth highlighting that there has been limited literature in this area over the last decade. Most of the literature comes from the 1990s and early 2000s, when anti-poverty strategies were a significant feature of the local government landscape. Consequently, many gaps remain in the research on understanding and evidence on the impact of local anti-poverty strategies. This knowledge gap forms the focus of this report, where we seek to present the latest evidence on local anti-poverty strategies.

What is an anti-poverty strategy?

It is important to understand what a local anti-poverty strategy is and what it is not.

A local anti-poverty strategy is a corporate strategy that allows for more efficient use of limited resources to help those on the lowest incomes, increase access to services for them, and increase control over their standard of living (Balloch and Jones, 1990). What's more, from GMPA's perspective and the research we have conducted, some common elements can be used to define a local anti-poverty strategy: it identifies the key issues contributing to poverty and sets out priorities for action, it is committed to cultural change, based on multi-stakeholder partnership working, it reinforces and links to existing strategies and is focused on making a long-term difference.

Furthermore, to maximise the effectiveness of local anti-poverty strategies, it is necessary to understand and define what it is not. It is not simply presenting a list of existing initiatives that the local authority has undertaken to address poverty or a shelved internal document.

A local anti-poverty strategy aims to bring greater consistency, close coordination of policy, and a sense of direction for local authorities and key local stakeholders to achieve realistic goals to improve the lives of those on the lowest incomes.

How do we define what makes a strategy 'good'?

It is not our intention to provide a generic 'off-the-shelf' approach for local authorities to use to take a strategic approach to poverty. The key elements identified are to be used as the basis for developing and/or enhancing local anti-poverty strategies. This recognises that a local place-based approach is needed and that existing context, such as levels of poverty and deprivation, local demographics and the nature of existing partnership working across agencies are among a range of factors that will shape how an anti-poverty strategy is formulated and how it will operate in practice. It is important to emphasise that good practice is not static and that local anti-poverty strategies need to be sustainable in completing current actions and adapting to future needs and changes (Oyen 2002, p.7).

Key elements of local anti-poverty strategies

Through the literature, we have identified key elements of local anti-poverty strategies that provide the basis for achieving realistic goals to support those on the lowest incomes in both the short and long term to prevent and reduce poverty in local communities.

We summarise the key elements identified as being indicative of a good local anti-poverty strategy into six which we discuss in turn: *prioritisation; partnership working; political and officer leadership; lived experience engagement and co-production; reinforcing and aligning with existing strategies; and monitoring and evaluation.*

In discussing each of these elements, we outline the key themes and issues to be considered.

Prioritisation

For local anti-poverty strategies to be effective, tangible actions are needed that translate into effective service delivery rather than general aims that remain as formal written commitments (Alcock, 2000). Local authorities need to be clear about their limitations, while articulating what can be achieved by maximising existing possibilities (Gordon et al., 2002; McKendrick, 2018).

External stakeholders

The role of external stakeholders such as those in the public, private and VCSE sectors is vital to the development and delivery of an effective anti-poverty strategy. It is important to draw on the resources and expertise of key local stakeholders, as local authorities have limited capacity and funding to fight poverty on their own. Pearson (2001, p.65) highlights how partnership working secures a range of other tangible benefits for local authorities: the opportunity to pool and share resources, sharing of best practice and expertise, avoiding duplication of effort, promoting joined-up solutions, and thinking to maximise outcomes for communities. It is required to ensure that tackling poverty is everybody's business, there is a shared understanding of priorities and alignment of local services to deliver the actions set out in the strategy (Gordon et al 2002, p. 13).

Political and officer leadership

To effectively develop and deliver an anti-poverty strategy requires strong leadership from all levels to ensure there is shared focus and prioritisation of tackling poverty. The Poverty and Inequality Commission (2019) highlights that high-level commitment helps to mobilise resources, facilitate partnership working and effectively deliver change. Having a lead officer and councillor with the responsibility of anti-poverty work gives the strategy impetus.

However, it is important that strategic management does not operate in isolation. The strategy objectives must be shared by departmental managers and front-line staff to avoid tokenism and resistance of departmental staff to take on actions because of expectations that those with the 'anti-poverty' responsibility are solely responsible for the delivery of the strategy (Alcock 2000, p. 70).

Lived experience engagement and co-production

To ensure that local anti-poverty strategies are tailored to local needs and are sustainable, local authorities must involve people who have lived experience of poverty in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategies (Pearson and Craig 2001; Gordon et al. 2002). However, engagement must be done in a genuinely meaningful and consistent way, to avoid it becoming a tick-box exercise, local authorities must aim to sustain and embed lived experience engagement (CFE research, 2020).

Reinforcing and aligning with existing strategies

Central to the development and delivery of an effective local anti-poverty strategy is rather than operating 'ad-hoc' to existing commitments and services, anti-poverty strategies need to be integrated into the overall activities of local authorities (Wheeler, 1995).

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring progress and evaluating the impact of local anti-poverty strategies is a real challenge. However, for local anti-poverty strategies to be effective, there needs to be a well-designed ongoing monitoring and evaluation mechanism to maintain momentum and ensure that local authorities and their partners achieve their goals (MacInnes et al., 2014). There is no 'one size fits all' approach to monitoring and evaluation but local authorities should use quantitative and qualitative data that is locally valid and relevant to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-poverty strategies.

Local authorities must not underestimate the importance of qualitative data (Thomas and Palfrey, 1996). Anti-poverty strategies need to utilise the voices of those with lived experience to understand what works, what does not, and what changes they would like to see. Additionally, anti-poverty strategies should include the voices of those working on the front lines to address and mitigate the impact of poverty in councils and partner organisations.

Methodology - how we approached this research

This chapter outlines the methodological approach that has been chosen to address the research question. The research was conducted over a period of three months from July to September 2022. This research is qualitative, it is based on the case study design, and it consists of desk-based research, literature review, semi-structured interviews, expert panel discussions, and a focus group. These methods were selected to gather context-rich data.

Literature review

A literature review was conducted, pertaining to strategic approaches to tackling poverty in local government, which included academic research, publications by organisations working in the anti-poverty field, and local authority specific literature.

Desk-based research

Desk-based research was conducted to collect and review relevant published documents relating to the six case studies' anti-poverty strategies detailed in this report.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with councillors and policy officers from each of the six local authorities to gain a deeper understanding of the strategies, uncover any gaps, and cross-validate information from the published strategy documents. This method was chosen as it is flexible and adaptable, it provides room to probe the interviewee to clarify and elaborate answers, yet it maintains a directive sense as the main questions to be discussed have been chosen beforehand (Alamri, 2019).

Expert panel discussions

We conducted two 'expert panel discussions' in August 2022 with a total of 12 participants. We conducted expert panel discussions for several reasons. Firstly, we wanted to explore what participants believed were the key elements and areas of action needed for an effective local anti-poverty strategy. Secondly, we wanted to establish what the perceived barriers are to implementing local anti-poverty strategies. Finally, to understand how strategies should be monitored and evaluated. The participants fell into the following groups:

- Academics with research interest in poverty.
- National organisations working in the field of anti-poverty work.
- Greater Manchester-based social enterprise providing health and wellbeing services.

In addition, we incorporated findings from GMPA's local authority officer's forum which brings together local authority officers from across Greater Manchester to support efforts to address poverty, discuss challenges and promote success. The forum provides an opportunity for local authority officers to hear from speakers across the UK about some of the most innovative approaches to preventing and reducing poverty.

Focus Group

A focus group was conducted with 12 people with lived experience of poverty. The focus group was held in September 2022, virtually on zoom and it was recorded. Post-focus group follow-up questions were emailed to participants to gain information on particularly interesting themes that arose from the discussions.

Participants were recruited from VCSE organisations working to address poverty in Greater Manchester. The aim was to have participants from each of the ten boroughs in Greater Manchester. Participants were recognised for their time in line with GMPA's approach to engaging people with lived experience of poverty in our work.

The central purpose of the focus group was to obtain a better understanding of the participant's experience of poverty in their community, and their views on how local authorities can improve support, services, and programmes to reduce poverty.

Confidentiality

To protect anonymity, the names of the participants are not disclosed in any of the direct quotations in this report.

Limitations

It is also important to address the limitations of the report. This is small-scale research, and due to the short time frame of the research, we chose a small sample for each of the data collection methods. The findings may not capture a full range of insight into the strategic role local authorities can play in addressing poverty. This means other elements of importance may not have been captured.

Another important limitation to highlight is that most of the anti-poverty strategies chosen in the report are still in their very early stages and their impact has yet to be evidenced over the medium to long-term.

Despite these limitations, this report provides a much-needed review of local strategic approaches to poverty across the country and identifies elements of good practice that local authorities should consider when designing and implementing a local anti-poverty strategy. It contributes important evidence on the role local authorities and partners can take to address poverty. It has highlighted there is scope for further research in this area as the policy landscape and context that local authorities are working in continues to change rapidly.

Analysis of anti-poverty strategies

In this chapter, we analyse the six case studies using the elements of a good anti-poverty strategy identified from our literature review. We then examine key aspects that emerged from the case studies as being important to maximise the effectiveness of the strategies.

Prioritisation

“We wanted to solve all the problems and we’ve kind of had to reconcile ourselves to focus on ... the areas where we could intervene and make a difference”.

All the local authorities emphasised that their strategies had limited scope due to the wider political climate. To ensure that the strategies were realistic and feasible, the councils articulated clearly what they could do to make a difference. In addition, a number of the aims and actions set out in their strategies were linked to lobbying and influencing central government for long term change in policies and practices.

Partnership working

“So there wasn’t duplication of services in one area and a lack of services in another”

“We’ve got some amazing voluntary sector groups in the city, but they didn’t know what each other did, they weren’t able to support each other, we’ve got different people working on debt advice or loneliness or food support, but they didn’t have a mechanism to talk to one another... to share best practice, or to refer to one another either, when one has a better set of expertise”.

All the local authorities recognised that they are not able to tackle poverty in isolation. They emphasised a strategic approach is important to share responsibility for addressing poverty and identify who is best placed to deliver support rather than duplicating efforts.

It increases accountability and scrutiny of what local action is being taken. Cross-council and multi-agency working were mentioned many times by the councils, both as key elements of the strategy design process and as elements integral to the delivery of the strategy. The value of the anti-poverty strategy was frequently noted as being in its ability to co-ordinate much of the work the councils were already doing.

Political and officer leadership

“As an officer, you couldn’t go forward in the way that we have without having supportive political leadership”.

“From an officer perspective, it is very helpful having a named executive councillor with responsibility in terms of reporting but also having the political weight behind the strategy and commitment”.

The six local authorities had political leadership on poverty, most councils had a cabinet/executive member with an explicit anti-poverty portfolio. They emphasised that this was critical to strategy development and implementation. The councils also reflected on the importance of senior officer leadership. Having high-level leadership was instrumental in giving the tackling poverty agenda a greater focus and increasing the willingness of organisations to engage with the councils.

Lived experience engagement and co-production

“We’ve found that it’s been most effective where we’ve worked through trusted intermediaries because sometimes people don’t necessarily want to speak to the local authority without an introduction from another voluntary group that’s working with them, supporting them”.

“Through lived experience engagement, what we established was that one of the big issues is that there is a lot of help out there for people, but people don’t necessarily know where to access it or it’s not clear to them how best to access it”.

All strategies referred to lived experience engagement. There were varying forms of engagement from a consultation basis such as online surveys and focus groups run by the council to Poverty Truth Commissions (PTC) run by external organisations. All clearly identified the importance of having people with lived experience involved in the development of strategies and the majority of councils were focused on trying to improve and continue the relationship to ensure lived experience is embedded in the strategies.

Furthermore, an important point raised by some councils was that they felt it was more effective to have lived experience engagement run by external organisations such as voluntary and community organisations to increase participation as people are often highly conscious of councils.

Reinforcing and aligning with existing strategies

“A holistic approach is one of the cost-neutral things we can bring in, and it advantages the people being helped and the council who are able to get things sorted quicker. A joined-up approach helps to catch people who need help much earlier”.

All the strategies demonstrated links to existing strategies and plans. The most frequently mentioned included economic, public health, and housing strategies. The councils described having a dedicated anti-poverty strategy ensures that poverty is everybody’s business and there is stronger clarity around responsibility within departments on specific actions to improve outcomes for those on the lowest incomes.

Monitoring and evaluation

“It’s quite challenging to pin down the metrics ... and also we recognise these don’t always show the full picture”.

All the strategies outline how they are monitoring and evaluating the strategies to understand what works and what does not.

They were using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to monitor the intended outcomes. Having a clear set of indicators was repeatedly referenced as being important but they are not set in stone and were emphasised as being seen as benchmarks. Some strategies highlighted that they were looking to upscale the use of qualitative data through engaging with external partners and people with lived experience of poverty as quantitative data does not always capture the full picture of the impact of local action to address poverty.

Most strategies included a mix of short and long-term monitoring and evaluation. Annual reviews, and progress reports were frequently cited, and they were published widely.

Some of the strategies were developing or were in the process of developing public-facing ‘evidence bases’ or dashboards that highlight selected statistics on local poverty to visualise the key issues and target interventions.

Key elements to emerge

Across the six case studies, the following elements emerged as being important to maximise the effectiveness of local anti-poverty strategies.

- Defining poverty and its drivers;
- Oversight and governance;
- Accompanying action plan;
- Focus on prevention, reduction, and mitigation of the effects of poverty;
- Adaptable and flexible; and
- Adoption of the socio-economic duty.

Defining poverty and its drivers

Understanding the nature and determinants of poverty was important to all the strategies. Most of the strategies defined poverty using a relative understanding- poverty is identified as occurring at the point when a household's income is below 60% of the median after housing costs. The strategies also clearly identify the drivers of poverty that targeted action is structured around. The most cited drivers include low wages, housing affordability and quality, unemployment, job quality, job security, and lack of skills and qualifications. There was a focus on identifying 'what matters' to communities and how local authorities can influence change at a local level.

Oversight and governance

All the local authorities had oversight and governance of the strategies. Some strategies have internal, such as working groups and committees made up of council officers, while others have internal and external governance, involving local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and boards working among partners in the region.

Responsibility for monitoring, scrutinising, making recommendations, sharing good practice, and liaising with local partners on the strategy were mentioned in all the strategies. All the councils described the importance of developing governance arrangements to provide strategic direction, facilitate better use of resources and increase transparency.

Accompanying action plan

All the strategies had an accompanying high-level action plan. These outline specific actions related to the strategic objectives and themes, timelines, and target milestones and who is responsible for leading the delivery (council, external stakeholders, or lobbying and influencing the central government). The councils described the action plan as important to facilitate priority setting and increase transparency on how the council is making progress.

Focus on prevention, reduction, and mitigation of the effects of poverty

The anti-poverty strategies were focused on balancing efforts to address the immediate effects of poverty and embedding preventive measures to address the long-term causes of poverty. The local authorities expressed that this is an ongoing challenge considering funding cuts, however identifying where local action is best targeted was necessary to maximise resource efficiency.

Prevention

A key element of the anti-poverty strategies was a strong emphasis on actions that address the root causes of poverty to reduce and prevent poverty in the long term. The councils recognise that they do not have all the answers, but they are focused on maximising the power and influence they have to combat poverty. Common actions highlighted by the local authorities as a priority for poverty prevention and reduction include boosting jobs and skills, raising wages and employment standards, increasing the amount of affordable social housing, and improving households' financial resilience.

There were policies, initiatives, and areas that were particularly critical to the council's approaches. These included:

- Focusing on getting more money into people's pockets to boost household and financial resilience. It was vital to all councils that households should have access to advice-based support services to access the financial services, products, and debt advice that will allow them to achieve and maintain financial stability, avoid high-interest debt, and improve their overall financial situation.
- Focusing on inclusive economic growth through job creation and improving job quality through for example paying council staff the Real Living Wage and calling on local employers to do so.
- Convening partners across employers (public, private, and voluntary and community), training and employability providers, and government agencies to support place-based employment and skills commissioning.
- Councils were working to improve the level of take-up of benefits and tax credits to deliver financial gains for residents through partnership working with organisations such as Citizens Advice and developed council online platforms to provide guidance to help residents maximise their eligible benefit income.
- Increasing the supply of social and affordable housing through entering partnerships with private and community developers.

Mitigation

While the local authorities are acutely aware of the need to invest in long-term solutions, the strategies emphasise the importance of providing targeted and effective crisis support for people facing an immediate financial crisis. The priority actions included in the strategies were focused on strengthening local welfare assistance schemes and maximising the accessibility of information, advice, and support services so that those in the greatest need can easily access support.

Councils provide local welfare assistance in a variety of forms including cash, vouchers, or assistance in-kind. However most local authorities stressed that there were working hard with partner organisations to take a cash-first and advice-first approach to the provision of local welfare rather than funding foodbanks or providing other forms of in-kind support. There was an emphasis that people who are experiencing a financial crisis should be given choice and control, all the local authorities were working to improve the offer of crisis support to maximise choice, flexibility and dignity and create greater efficiencies.

Adaptable and flexible

“It is a living breathing strategy, rather than a document on the shelf”.

The local authorities highlighted the importance of the strategies not being set in stone. They emphasised they must be flexible to respond to frequent changes in circumstances. Most of the strategies had a duration of three years, and continual renewal was a recurrent theme to ensure the strategies were as responsive to local needs as possible.

Adoption of the socio-economic duty

Salford has adopted the socio-economic duty and Rother District has put forward a motion to adopt it. They highlighted that it is a central element of a strategic approach to maximise impact on poverty, as it ensures all decisions taken by the council is assessed against the impact they have on people from low-income backgrounds. It complements and strengthens other policies, which are aimed at addressing socio-economic inequalities. They have drawn on our body of knowledge and best practice on the socio-economic duty, and the principles of adoption set out in our guide developed in partnership with several organisations on socio-economic implementation (GMIPA and Just Fair, 2021). The principles are supporting the local authorities to make poverty a strategic priority ([see adopt the socio-economic duty](#)).

Chapter 4

Case Studies

In this chapter, we explore the case study selection and conduct an in-depth detailed examination of the six case studies. We structure each case study using the following categories: context, scope and design, development of the strategy, delivering the strategy and monitoring and evaluation.

Case study strategy

The six case studies have been selected based on three primary considerations.

Firstly, we aimed to ensure there was a geographical spread across the UK. Secondly, the strategies were assessed against the following criteria informed by the literature review to generate insights into what are the key elements of an anti-poverty strategy: *prioritisation; partnership working; political and officer leadership; lived experience engagement and co-production; reinforcing and aligning with existing strategies; and monitoring and evaluation*. Thirdly, the overarching population focus of the strategy had to be broad.

However, it must be said that there have been some constraints on case study selection. Due to the overall lack of local anti-poverty strategies in England, we were limited to a small sample, and from this sample, we choose the six case studies as being the most adequate and appropriate to answer the research question we have posed and the above considerations.

The key characteristics of the local authorities are presented below in figure 1.

Figure 1: Case study selection

Case Study	Region	Type of Council	Geographic Area	Majority Party	Child Poverty Rate (Relative AHC) Average UK Child Poverty Rate is 27%	Unemployment Rate Average UK Unemployment Rate is 3.8%	Index of Multiple Deprivation: Rand of Average Score (1 = Most Deprived, 317 = Least Deprived)	Estimated % of Households experiencing struggle with food insecurity
Salford City Council	North West England	Metropolitan City Council	Urban	Labour	32.5%	5.3%	18	9.6%
East Devon District Council	South West England	District Council	Rural	Independent	22%	2.7%	244	8.2%
Cambridge City Council	East of England	District Council	Urban	Labour	22.6%	3%	210	4.4%
Scottish Borders	South East Scotland	Scottish Council	Rural	Conservative/Independent coalition	21%	3.4%	-	8.2%
Rother District Council	East Sussex, England	District Council	Suburban	Rother Alliance (mixture of Independent, Liberal Democrat, Labour and Green Party Councillors)	47.2%	4.2%	139	7.1%
Leicester City Council	East Midlands, England	Unitary Authority	Urban	Labour	38.2%	4.7%	32	11.5%

Note: These were the majority parties at the time the research was conducted in 2022.

Source for child poverty rate: Centre for Research in Social Policy (2022).

Source for unemployment rate: Office for National Statistics (2022).

Source for index of multiple deprivation: Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019).

Source for estimated % of households experiencing struggle with food insecurity: Blake, Whitworth and Moretti (2021).

Salford City Anti-Poverty Strategy

Context

Salford has high levels of poverty and deprivation across the city. It is the 18th most deprived local authority area in England (out of 317) and the third most deprived local authority in Greater Manchester (Salford City Council, 2019).

Salford City Council has a long tradition of anti-poverty work and is recognised as a leader in Greater Manchester for its pioneering approach to addressing poverty at a local level.

In 2016, Salford City Council's newly elected Mayor placed tackling poverty at the heart of his vision for 'a fairer and better Salford'. In response to growing hardship for many residents in Salford, the City Council announced, in 2017, its new anti-poverty strategy: *No One Left Behind: Tackling Poverty in Salford*. The strategy set out the following themes, around which collective action centres: *supporting people who are struggling in poverty now, preventing people from falling into poverty in the first place, and influencing the government and other national organisations to get a better deal for Salford people*.

In 2021, working with organisations including GMPA, the council refreshed its second four-year Tackling Poverty Strategy as one of the three interlinked strategies launched under the 'Salford Way' (the other two being the inclusive and green economy strategy and the equalities and inclusion strategy), a key part of the council's Great Eight Priorities. The aim of these strategies is to capture issues at a city-wide level, ensuring a coordinated approach at the full council level, and streamlining work to ensure a focus on tackling poverty.

The council feels it makes sense to have an overarching anti-poverty strategy that is dynamic and live. They highlighted when the strategy was refreshed, a major focus was on recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, however this year with the Cost-of-living Crisis the focus is also on strengthening the immediate response and support available to residents in the short term, alongside the long-term measures to tackle the root causes of poverty.

Whilst the council is acutely aware that there is no 'magic bullet' to tackle poverty at a local level, the strategy and its accompanying high-level action plan provide a clear agenda for actions to be taken, embedding an anti-poverty culture within the council, and putting those with lived experience of poverty at the heart of decision making.

Scope and design

Vision

The Strategy sets out Salford's City Councils' vision *"to make Salford a fairer and more inclusive place where everyone can reach their full potential and live prosperous and fulfilling lives free from poverty and inequality"*.

Poverty definition and identification of the drivers of poverty in Salford

The previous strategy outlined Salford's definition of poverty. They primarily use median household income to measure levels of poverty - poverty is identified as occurring at the point when a household's income is below 60% of the median after housing costs.

However, they are aware of the limitations of this definition, and so they have developed their own definition informed by the Salford Poverty Truth Commission and Joseph Rowntree Foundation. They define poverty as "applying to anyone who is denied, through low income or lack of resources, the opportunity to participate fully in the life of the community and have quality access to education, healthcare and leisure activities, as well as the necessities of life including good housing and adequate food and clothing".

The previous strategy highlights the key causes and effects of poverty in Salford that have informed the priorities of the strategy. These include:

- Unemployment and underemployment
- Low pay
- Ineffective social security system
- Lack of skills and qualifications
- Household debt
- Poor physical and mental health
- High housing and living costs

Target population

The strategy is aimed at reducing poverty for people of all ages and circumstances. However, a key element of the strategy is focused on empowering individuals and communities to recognise poverty as a societal rather than individual problem and ensure that they feel part of the solution. This also includes a recognition that certain groups do face a higher risk of poverty and initiatives in the strategy seek to reflect this and understand the unique intersectional issues facing different communities. They identify the following groups:

- People with a disability or suffering from ill health
- Lone parents, larger families, and carers
- Children and young people
- Older people
- Some ethnic minority groups (including refugees and asylum seekers)
- People who are unemployed
- People experiencing homelessness

Funding

There is no single tackling poverty strategy budget; because the strategy works across all departments, funding streams are provided from all budgets relevant to the specific key actions set out in the strategy.

Development of Strategy

Partnership working

The strategies have been developed through extensive work with a number of local stakeholders both external and internal to the council. Salford's approach emphasises that partnership working is an ongoing relationship, they do not see organisations as having to sign up to the strategy because they see the strategy as city-wide. It is about making poverty everyone's business through the development and progression of the strategy. They keep it constantly under review so that they are continuing to develop networks, and as such, they do not require organisations to be involved from the beginning of the strategy. The stakeholders involved include the Salford Poverty Truth Commission, Salford Community and Voluntary Services (CVS), local housing associations, GMPA, and other VCSE sector organisations and council-delivered services.

Accompanying the strategies is a high-level action plan, and within that there are specific tasks focused on co-production and the development of the strategy to make sure it remains live. A key action for the Principal Policy Officer for Poverty and Inequality includes ensuring these actions within the plan are reviewed by key stakeholders both within and out with the city council to ensure a whole systems approach. For example, updating representatives on the implementation of specific initiatives within the strategy such as the socio-economic duty through the Salford CVS-facilitated VOCAL thematic forums.

Anti-Poverty Taskforce

In 2017, to support the strategy, the council, and the Sustainable Housing & Urban Studies Unit (SHUS) at the University of Salford established the Salford Anti-Poverty Taskforce (University of Salford, 2020). This was created to improve the lives of citizens experiencing poverty and inequality by providing high quality academic research underpinned by co-production and co-creation with key stakeholders, including those with lived experience.

This work fed into delivery of the anti-poverty strategy to ensure that policies have the greatest impact and are relevant to the issues that residents in Salford are facing, with recommendations from the research projects being implemented and actioned. Publication of the research has also provided the opportunity to raise awareness and lobby for policy change at a national level. Successful projects included an analysis of the experiences and barriers facing Salford's young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET).

The council continues to work in collaboration with the University of Salford on anti-poverty issues, including a new three-year research project into underemployment.

The role of lived experience

From the very beginning, the council felt it was crucial to focus on co-production and co-development with people with lived experience of poverty. In addition to engaging with people's feedback on policies which were already in place or due to be implemented. They emphasised to prevent it from being a tick-box exercise, they are constantly trying to improve and continue this relationship to ensure lived experience is embedded in the strategy.

The first Salford Poverty Truth Commission (PTC) was launched in July 2016, run externally as a partnership between Community Pride and Church Action on Poverty. It consisted of 15 people with lived experience of poverty and 15 people from businesses and public figures who came together to explore ways of addressing poverty.

Its recommendations have influenced key aspects of the Tackling Poverty Strategy. A key change included:

- A review of debt recovery/income collection systems: The PTC was instrumental in providing first-hand experience of how detrimental these processes can be to people's lives. As a result of this, the council transformed its debt recovery policies to ensure they are as sensitive as possible and do not create further hardship for vulnerable people. They use people's first non-payment of council tax as an early warning system, sending a personal letter/text offering support rather than an impersonal 'you owe us' letter. They have also stopped the use of enforcement agents when recovering debts from the most vulnerable residents who receive a council tax reduction. This change has had a positive impact on both residents and the council, which has seen an increase in revenue from council tax payments.

The second Salford PTC is currently ongoing, and the council emphasised that these would continue to be crucial to the development of future strategies.

Priorities

Like the previous strategy, the focus of the city's collective efforts and resources is on the following three themes:

Preventing people from falling into poverty: Salford prioritises addressing the root causes of poverty, to achieve long-term sustainable poverty reduction. Some initiatives include:

- Becoming a Living Wage City. They have a task force, made up of public, private, and voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations which works to increase the number of businesses paying the Living Wage in Salford.
- Further developing and promoting the BetterOff Salford website: a platform that helps people find and apply for benefit entitlements and search for work opportunities. They also offer BetterOff coffee and chat drop-in sessions, providing face-to-face and online support to those facing a financial crisis.
- Delivering more homes to ensure people can afford to rent (private, social, and affordable) or buy in Salford. They are working with housing partners and have committed to 1,074 affordable homes and through the council's ethical housing company Dérive, they are committed to directly delivering an additional 3,000 affordable homes over the coming years.

Providing targeted support for people struggling in poverty: Salford's approach emphasises that whilst they are dedicated to preventing and reducing poverty, people are currently facing severe issues and as such, they require immediate assistance to cope with increasing financial emergencies in the aftermath of Covid-19 and the ongoing Cost-of-living Crisis. They are working to increase the support available to those who need immediate assistance. Some initiatives include:

- Strengthening and investing in Salford Assist - Salford's local welfare assistance scheme. This provides short-term emergency help for people experiencing financial hardship such as food, fuel, and council tax support.
- Increasing investment in the council's Welfare Rights and Debt Advice Service to ensure independent advice and representation on social welfare law (benefits and debt) to those facing a financial crisis or at risk of homelessness, as well as work with key partners including Adult Social Care, Children's Services, and mental health services where advice at critical stages contributes towards prevention outcomes. Since January 2022, the service has achieved gains of £4.6 million for people in the city.
- Utilising the Get back on track campaign, which provides help for people struggling to pay their council tax bill. Salford continues to invest in stopping council tax debt from escalating.

Campaigning for long-term change in government policies and practices: Salford stresses that whilst they are doing all they can with the powers and resources they have available to address poverty, the main drivers of poverty lie with the national government. They focus on influencing the poverty debate, working with key local stakeholders, other Greater Manchester local authorities, and the GMCA to ensure poverty prevention and reduction gets a much higher profile through continuing to build an evidence base and campaigning for change. Some of the campaigning and influencing work they are seeking to do includes:

- Campaigning for a reversal of welfare changes made over the past decade such as benefits cap, bedroom tax and two-child limit.
- Working with GMPA and other partners across Greater Manchester to call on the government to develop a new national strategy for tackling poverty.

Delivering the strategy

The council wanted to make sure that there is also an action plan in place to deliver the strategy's key ambitions which is kept under review and continually updated. The action plan presents what actions are already being implemented or proposed to be implemented to tackle poverty, key outcomes and timescales and the lead officer who is responsible for driving the work forward.

Responsibility

The council sees tackling poverty as being the responsibility of all council departments. They highlight that the existence of the strategy and adoption of the socio-economic duty has helped to embed a strong anti-poverty culture within the council ([see adopt the socio-economic duty](#)). To support the development of the strategy and action plan as well as developing networks within and outside of the council, they have a Principal Policy Officer for Poverty and Inequality.

Leadership

There is political leadership within the council on tackling poverty it sits with the Lead Member for Inclusive Economy, Anti-Poverty and Equalities. They highlighted that having political commitment has enabled greater prioritisation of poverty throughout all work.

However, since activity on delivery of the strategy falls across a number of different service areas and cabinet portfolios, progress and key decisions on specific areas also continue to be reported to each Lead Member alongside the Lead Member for Anti-Poverty. All three strategies under The Salford Way are also subject to a biannual progress update which includes going through both an internal and external governance process.

Socio-economic duty

The council has voluntarily implemented the socio-economic duty, informed, and influenced by our guide developed in partnership with several organisations on socio-economic implementation. They recognise it is an important mechanism to ensure that socio-economic disadvantage is embedded within all decision-making processes, across all council services. As part of its implementation, the council created a dedicated toolkit for the incorporation of the duty into the equality impact assessment process. A detailed framework was designed for elected members and council services, which highlighted best practise and guidance in using the duty. This was supported by an integrated training programme.

To support the implementation process, the council had a 'soft launch' period allowing them to explore how the duty could be best utilised to avoid it becoming a 'tick box' exercise, before following this up with an evaluation after six months. This evaluation is currently underway, with initial findings suggesting that the duty is complementing and strengthening work to reduce inequality of outcomes.

Links to other strategies

The council has several other strategies that the Tackling Poverty Strategy aligns with and supports the delivery of. The key ones being the Inclusive and Green Economy Strategy; the Equalities and Inclusion Strategy; Salford's Homelessness Strategy; and the city's Locality Plan 2020-2025. This is in recognition that inequality is interlinked and that all parts of the system have a key role to play in tackling this issue. The council is working to make sure actions in each of the strategies are as integrated as possible with the anti-poverty work to achieve the most holistic and preventative approach. For example, within the action plan, there are key actions around the other strategies which involve the Principal Officer for Poverty and Inequality attending the working groups for these to keep updated on work that is being done and to see how it can be integrated for maximum impact.

Monitoring and evaluation

The council recognises that integral to delivery is being transparent with how the strategy is working. The strategy itself highlights how it will measure its success, for example, by fewer young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), an increase in average household incomes and wages, and an increase in the number of children deemed school ready.

However, the accompanying action plan sets out the key actions that underpin each of the strategic priorities with specific measurable outcomes/milestones. The council is focused on increasing the collection and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data to build a robust understanding of poverty at a localised level, and how national-level policies are reflected in the data and use this to inform service delivery. It sets out short-term (up to 12 months) and longer-term (over 12 months) targets. Key outcomes/milestones include:

- Increasing the number of accredited living wage employers in the city with reference to the Living Wage Action Plan to meet the target of 70 accredited employers by 2022.
- Continuing to regularly use all appropriate channels to encourage uptake amongst local people of all available support to help them avoid/combat poverty.
- Highlighting the rise in child poverty and the impact of this at both a local and national level, campaigning for a centralised strategy alongside GMPA that allocates sufficient resources and promotes better outcomes for children from low-income households.

The council emphasised that in light of the Cost-of-living Crisis, some metrics will most likely get worse, therefore they are making sure to upscale the evidence base of case studies. They are using these to keep under review how things can be done differently and how they can achieve more by utilising new initiatives and integration of data.

The Salford Way: Integrated evidence base

The council is committed to being open and transparent about how the strategy is working, they have developed a public-facing, integrated evidence base, which uses core indicators from each of the three interlinked Salford Way strategies to show how the council is working across the priorities. It shows selected statistics on poverty in Salford such as earnings and income, living-wage employers, and child poverty levels, broken down into wards.

Oversight and governance

The council has a range of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the strategy which is both internal (with an anti-poverty operational group, that monitor, scrutinise, make recommendations, and share best practice) and external (it is governed by the Salford Health and Wellbeing Board, which works across the city partners). The evaluation is used to add other elements to the strategy as the wider situation changes, as well as measure the current impact of the strategy.

Salford Health and Wellbeing Board

The Salford Health and Wellbeing Board has overall responsibility for monitoring and measuring the impact of the strategy and reporting progress through publishing an annual progress report for stakeholders and the wider public to view. The council highlighted that its role is important to the strategy as it provides an objective and expert point of support for the delivery of the key actions in strategy and ensures that actions being implemented at a practical level are streamlined with other relevant strategies such as Salford's Locality Plan 2020-25 to reduce social, economic and health inequalities.

Rother District Anti-Poverty Strategy

Context

Rother District Council is one of the five district and Borough Councils in the County of East Sussex in the South East of England. Rother is ranked 135th (out of 317) local authority for deprivation and contains fairly affluent areas that sit alongside pockets of significant deprivation. Rother now has two neighbourhoods among the most deprived decile (compared to one in 2019) both within Bexhill Sidley ward, and there are six LSOAs in parts of Sidley, Central Bexhill, and Eastern Rother that are among the most deprived 20% in England.

There are particular challenges facing the district which include:

- An ageing population: Rother has one of the oldest populations, 9.24% of Rother is aged 80+, almost double the national average of 4.96%. The proportion of over 65s is projected to increase by 20% by 2026 and 55% by 2041.
- Disabilities and long-term illness: Over 23% of Rother residents have a disability or long-term illness, which is significantly higher than levels nationally and in the South East. In addition, the percentage of the population who provide 50 or more hours per week of unpaid care is significantly higher than the national average.
- Housing tenure and affordability: The proportion of social housing in Rother is significantly lower than averages across the South East and nationally, and many residents have difficulty accessing affordable private rental properties.

In response to growing poverty levels in a number of localities in Rother, the council (led by the Rother Alliance, a coalition administration of independent, Liberal Democrat, Labour and Green Party councillors) committed to developing an anti-poverty strategy as part of the council's corporate plan 2020 to 2027. The council is realistic in its ambitions, as a district council it is limited in what it can do due to not only budgetary constraints but also because the main areas that can make an impact in addressing poverty are under the remit of East Sussex County Councils' or require national change.

Despite this, the council emphasised that the strategy and its accompanying action plan are part of its new approach to making positive changes on what it can control and increasing its influence to engage with others to make changes beyond what it can control.

The anti-poverty strategy is a five-year strategy from 2022 until 2027. The council described the strategy as being an important first step towards developing a more comprehensive response to tackling poverty locally. It is being used as a catalyst to improve existing ways of working and launch additional work across all key local stakeholders to improve outcomes for those living in poverty in Rother.

This case study provides variety among our other case studies because it has been formulated fairly recently, with the Cabinet approving the strategy in March 2022. As the strategy is in its early days, it has not yet been evaluated, but we have included it as an example of the measure's councils with limited scope and resources can take to address poverty.

Scope and design

Vision

The strategy sets out Rother District council's vision, *"to work together to tackle the symptoms of poverty in order to reduce its impact and create a fair, healthy, prosperous, thriving and sustainable Rother, now and for future generations to come"*.

Poverty definition and identification of the drivers of poverty in Rother District

The council defines poverty in relative terms, explaining that "you are poor if you are unable to live at the standard that most other people would expect. A child can have three meals a day, warm clothes, and go to school, but still be poor because her parents do not have enough money to ensure she can live in a warm home, have access to a computer to do her homework, or go on the same school trips as her classmates. More than 2,500 children in Rother are living in poverty".

In the strategy, they emphasise that references made to poverty are to relative income poverty. They define households in Rother as living in relative poverty if their combined income is 60% or less of the average (median) household income in after housing costs.

Rother is home to significant health inequalities and the council recognises that poverty is one of the main causes of poor health and health inequalities. They are working to deliver the vision set out in the strategy through a health and environmental lens. Using the Health Foundation evidence hub, they have identified the main drivers of health inequalities as being fundamentally poverty related. The council is focused on addressing these drivers where possible with key local stakeholders. The drivers include:

- Lack of money and resources
- Unemployment, work quality, and job security
- Housing affordability and quality
- Inadequate transport
- Exposure to pollution and access to the natural environment
- Barriers to community cohesion and participation

Funding

The district faces significant budgetary constraints, and as such there is no dedicated budget for the strategy. The council stressed that whilst they are restricted in how much they can do, the aim of the strategy is to improve the coordination of resources rather than creating new interventions.

Development of the strategy

Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group

In 2020, a cross-party Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group (APT&FG) was set up by the Overview and Scrutiny committee, to investigate the causes and effects of poverty locally and make recommendations to the cabinet to inform future council policy. It appointed six members, who were supported by officers from the Corporate Core, Policy and Housing, and Community services. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided input into the review.

The Rother Alliance developed a series of proposals for the APT&FG. They fell into two categories: research and evidence gathering (to determine the level of poverty across the district and establish best practice to combat it) and strategy and actions (improving the council's existing services, implementing new schemes and initiatives, and establishing an effective anti-poverty strategy to deliver on the aims set out in the group).

The APT&FG had two aims: to contribute to the development of the anti-poverty strategy and to identify new ways of working to reduce poverty and hardship within the district.

The group also had a number of objectives, these include:

- Reviewing how to boost financial inclusion and access to financial products.
- Assessing the impact of the Council Tax Reduction Policy and discretionary housing benefit payments (DHP).
- Investigating the availability of different forms of advice and the affordability of fuel, food, and other provisions and the role of the council in supporting this.

The APT&FG held events in 2020 and 2021 to gather evidence from key local stakeholders both external and internal to the council to meet its objectives and develop the strategy.

The first event involved a range of partner agencies, who the APT&FG asked to summarise the services they offer, the gaps in service provision, and the service users' experience of poverty.

The council emphasised that the evidence-gathering sessions were important to the development of the strategy as they highlighted that there is a strong commitment from key local stakeholders to alleviate the symptoms of poverty. In addition, the sessions highlighted areas for improvement in the delivery of services by the council and their partners. The evidence-gathering sessions helped established the strategies' key aims.

Partnership working

The strategy is a culmination of work done by the APT&FG, in collaboration with wider authorities, outside bodies, and the voluntary sector. This is to ensure that the aims are relevant, and the action plan is achievable with the resources available locally.

The strategy highlights that tackling poverty requires a commitment from all partners to joint working. The council has been given a commitment by voluntary, statutory, and business sectors to work to address poverty.

The strategy and action plan have been developed and are being delivered by the council in partnership with Rother Voluntary Action (RVA) through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSA). The council highlighted that the RVA's knowledge has been fundamental to the strategy as they have insight into what is happening on the ground, and they already coordinate much of the activity in the area which supports residents facing financial difficulties.

In November 2021, a multi-agency event was held by the council in partnership with RVA. The event reviewed the recommended objectives of the APT&FG and identified the aims and actions that would support the delivery of the strategy. RVA presented feedback and case studies following a series of consultations with local community groups from urban and rural areas of the district. The findings of the APT&FG, informed by the evidence gathering sessions, were reviewed, and condensed into a series of aims and actions, which have been captured in the strategy's action plan.

Consultation

To identify any gaps for inclusion and gather further evidence of the potential impact of the strategy and action plan, the council consulted with a range of groups. The majority of the consultation took place via an online questionnaire from April to May 2022, however written and telephone consultation responses were also accepted. The groups who responded included:

- Users of community and support services.
- 25 local organisations including seven town and parish councils.
- 13 charities and voluntary agencies alongside three public sector organisations and two political parties (branches).
- Internal council departments such as the Planning Policy team.

Priorities

The strategy highlights the following three aims for the council and community services operating in the Rother District to reduce levels of poverty:

Coordination: developing local strategic commissioning and operational structures to coordinate services designed to alleviate poverty. The evidence-gathering sessions identified a lack of coordination and duplication of services, leading to service users experiencing confusion because of the array of statutory, voluntary, and community services available.

Access: maximise the accessibility of services so that those in the greatest need can be reached. The evidence-gathering sessions demonstrated that there are gaps in service accessibility; Rother is predominantly rural which means it is challenging to deliver services due to poor internet access and support hubs situated in inconvenient locations.

Promotion: promote information, advice, and support to service users and professionals. The evidence-gathering sessions conveyed that there needs to be upskilling of council staff so that residents are provided with information and advice in a timely manner.

Delivering the strategy

Responsibility

To support the development and delivery of the strategy and action plan, it is being led by the council's head of housing and community service. However, the council emphasised that the strategy has been important in enshrining to council officers that every department must consider how their work is contributing to reducing poverty in Rother and the need for cross-departmental work.

Leadership

A change in political leadership was central to the formation of the anti-poverty strategy, as councillors with first and second-hand experience of poverty brought with them a determination to tackle the issue. The anti-poverty strategy responsibility sits under the cabinet portfolio for housing and homelessness and there is a spokesperson for young person's/child poverty.

Anti Poverty Strategy Steering Group (APSSG)

The multi-agency Rother APSSG works to deliver the aims and actions identified within the strategy and the action plan to ensure objectives remain achievable. The APSSG will provide periodic progress updates to the Rother LSP.

The council emphasised that the APSSG will develop and refine its objectives as it establishes itself, identifying gaps in service provision and areas where greater collaboration and coordination between services can support outcomes for residents.

Socio-economic duty

Encouraged by our influence that adopting the socio-economic duty is a central element of a strategic approach to addressing poverty a motion was submitted in September 2022 for the cabinet and council to explore voluntarily adopting the socio-economic duty. To affirm the council's commitment to preventing and combatting hardship, alongside a Cost-of-living Emergency declaration.

Links to other strategies

The council highlighted that delivery of the strategy is integrated with a range of existing strategies including its Housing, Homelessness, and Rough Sleeping Strategy, Local Plan and the Hastings and Rother Food Networks 'Food insecurity Strategy for Rother'.

Through the strategy, the council are seeking greater strategic alignment with wider health and well-being aims and objectives, including those of the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board, as they recognise that poverty is both a cause and consequence of the poor health that is impacting on residents in the district.

Monitoring and evaluation

The strategy is in its early stages and as such the council has not defined the specific measures that will be used to evaluate the impact of the strategy. The action plan currently sets out the actions which underpin each objective, the timeline for completing these and who is responsible for this. The majority of these are the responsibility of the APSSG, who are currently refining the action plan. Some of the key actions include:

- Delivering new Bexhill place-based Hub and new rural virtual Hubs and supporting existing service hubs with more targeted signposting.
- APSSG creating a 'street sheet' leaflet summarising services and where they are located to support greater accessibility.
- APSSG to develop a training resource video of local services for residents and frontline staff.

Oversight and governance

Rother Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

The council described the LSP as the 'logic vehicle' for supporting and monitoring the progress of the strategy action plan due to the strategy being embedded in partnership working. This also has the advantage of ensuring buy-in from high-level leadership in the area. The LSP's role is to promote the strategies objectives through the East Sussex Strategy Partnership, support the coordination of existing resources and influence future service commissioning through its networks.

The LSP will provide an annual report which will: detail the successes and progress made towards meeting the objectives, outline priorities to action for the year ahead, and look at the poverty challenges and responses from partners.

East Devon District Anti-Poverty strategy

Context

East Devon District Council is one of eight district Councils within the county of Devon in the South West of England. East Devon has strong economic growth and investment in the area has created employment opportunities in a variety of sectors such as hi-tech and bio-technology businesses. Despite this, a significant number of residents are affected by poverty due to a combination of low pay and the high Cost-of-living in the area.

In 2019 the council's housing and benefits team identified that there were worsening levels of poverty, with concentrations of poverty in particular communities. Below are key figures which depict the issues East Devon is facing:

- A quarter of residents in East Devon receive a weekly wage that, at £275.60, is only 65% of the average weekly pay (£426.10) in the district.
- East Devon has a higher proportion of part-time workers (37.5%) than the South West (36.3%) and the UK (32.4%).
- In 2019, the average lower quartile monthly rent was £650, while lower quartile average house prices were ten or more times the average lower quartile earnings.

The anti-poverty strategy is a three-year strategy from 2021 to 2024, which is accompanied by an action plan. The strategy is embedded in the council's plan for 2021 to 2023, where it is set out as one of the priority actions in the council's priority one: better homes and communities for all. The council recognises that they do not have all the answers and many areas are outside of their control or influence, nevertheless, they are committed to making sure the council leverages its power and influence where possible to make a difference to residents.

The council emphasises that the creation of the strategy has provided a clear framework for addressing poverty in East Devon and focuses on the areas the council does have the opportunity to improve and influence. It identifies which specific groups need support and the geographic areas which they need to be targeted.

Scope and design

Vision

The council sets out its vision in the strategy, it states that it wants to ensure that:

- Nobody should get into poverty without immediate help from the council.
- Nobody should be in involuntary poverty longer than 2 years in East Devon.

Poverty definition and identification of the drivers of poverty in East Devon

The council accepts that there are several definitions of poverty, however, they refer to the most common measure, relative income poverty. They define it as *"a person or community that lacks the financial resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living; and where a household income is below 60% of the average"*.

The strategy outlines the causes and effects of poverty, combining the issues the Joseph Rowntree Foundation identifies with local knowledge through the poverty working panel informed by residents and key local stakeholders. The causes identified include:

- Low-paid, insecure jobs
- Low skills or education
- Ineffective benefits system
- High cost of housing, goods, and services
- Financial literacy
- Discrimination

Development of strategy

Poverty Working Panel

A Poverty Working Panel was created by the council in 2020 primarily tasked with identifying how the tackling poverty/anti-poverty approach could be coordinated, improved, and captured in a corporate strategy document that improves the situation for households in East Devon. The Poverty Working Panel is chaired by the portfolio holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities and made up of elected members and officers.

The Panel focused on poverty-related to income and employment, debt and financial vulnerability, food, and nutrition, affordable warmth and water, affordable housing and homelessness, and health equality.

The Panel pursued nine lines of inquiry to develop the strategy, ranging from how best the council can coordinate partnerships to how could the strategy be cross-cutting and meaningful.

Partnership working

Partnership working has been integral to the formation of the strategy. The council highlighted that it has worked closely and continues to work with a number of partners to ensure the strategy remains fit for purpose.

To pursue the lines of inquiry mentioned above, the poverty working plan gathered evidence to inform the development of their strategy. They considered examples of good practice, such as Cambridge City Council's anti-poverty strategy and asked internal and external stakeholders to give evidence on key issues. Over this period, they worked with the council's housing and benefits team and economic development team, as well as external organisations such as DWP, Citizens Advice, and Local Enterprise Partnership.

¹ See case study 4.

Funding

The strategy does not have a specific budget of its own, instead the council is using pots of funding already allocated to services and general hardship funding. The strategy has not required a huge amount of additional funding, as it has pulled together work that the council has been doing for a number of years and is adding layers to it.

Priorities

The strategy is underpinned by three themes, which are summarised below:

1. Addressing the causes and effects of poverty: The main purpose of the strategy is poverty reduction across East Devon. The council is seeking to balance ongoing efforts to address the effects of poverty with a further focus on preventative work in partnership with key local stakeholders both external and internal to the council.
2. Balancing direct delivery, partnership working, and influencing activity: The strategy seeks to outline actions that the council can deliver directly or in partnership with public, voluntary, and community partners. In addition, it highlights issues which require influencing and lobbying activity to bring about change and secure funding.
3. Building the capacity of residents and communities and facilitating community action and mutual support: The strategic approach is focused on building the capacity of residents and communities. The council are working with residents and communities to identify the solutions to poverty.

The Poverty Working Panel has developed five strategic objectives with lead services identified to work on specific core aims. The strategy and action plan that accompanies the strategy highlights the key activities that the council will take to achieve the objectives through direct service delivery, partnership working, and influencing and lobbying.

Below we outline the objectives and include a selection of some of the key activities under them:

1. Helping people on low incomes to maximise their household income and minimise their costs, building financial resilience and reducing indebtedness. Lead Service – Finance.

- Partnership actions: The council provides funding to voluntary and community groups for activities that achieve one or more of the priorities or actions listed in the strategy and action plan. The Action on Poverty Fund accepts applications for grants of between £500 to £5,000.

2. Strengthening families and communities, including supporting groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty, and community and voluntary groups working to combat poverty. Lead Service – Housing.

- District council actions: Reviewing the needs of the community and voluntary sector in building stronger communities and identifying where the Council can best provide support.

3. Promoting an inclusive economy, by raising skills and improving access to a range of employment opportunities for people on low incomes. Lead Service – Growth, Development & Prosperity.

- Influencing lobbying actions: Lobbying the Government on relevant economic policy issues and seeking to influence the strategic approach of the Local Enterprise Partnership.

4. Addressing the high cost of housing, improving housing conditions, creating affordable warmth, and reducing homelessness. Lead Service – Housing.

- District council actions: Developing new Council homes for rent and ensuring that rent levels are as affordable as possible. The Council has an ambitious programme to deliver at least 100 new council homes over 5 years subject to funding being available.

5. Improving health outcomes for people on low incomes, including access to good diet, health care, and ill health prevention. Lead Service – Environmental Health.

- Partnership actions: Supporting outreach advice services for residents experiencing mental health issues due to low income, debt, or addiction.

Delivering the strategy

Responsibility

Responsibility for delivering the strategy is shared across the council and partner organisations. The council emphasised that they cannot tackle poverty in isolation. The objectives of the strategy can only be achieved when the strategy has a strong commitment from assigned council leads and departments and works effectively in partnership with key local stakeholders.

The accompanying action plan comprises of 61 actions, some of which are subdivided, and others are shared by more than one council department. Certain actions will be developed and delivered in partnership with local stakeholders, while others will be delivered through lobbying government and other national organisations.

Leadership

The council highlights that political commitment coming from the council lead, cabinet, and portfolio holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities (who has poverty as a named responsibility) has strengthened the strategy's reach. The strategy's objectives are linked to lead services and there is a strong commitment from the heads of the departments to deliver the key actions.

Links to other strategies

The strategy cuts across all council services to ensure poverty is considered in every area of council delivery. The council emphasised that poverty is a cross-cutting issue and there are clear linkages and alignment with a number of strategies/policies including the public health strategy, housing strategy, corporate debt policy, and equality policy.

Monitoring and evaluation

The action plan details completion dates, performance measures, and outcomes. Each lead service which has activities that link into the action plan will periodically review those items and report back to the Poverty Working Panel with updates on progress. Light-touch reviews will be made annually, while the official review of the strategy takes place every three years.

The action plan includes the following types of performance measures and outcomes:

- Data on where referrals for financial support have come from e.g., schools, local charities, support agencies, and foodbanks.
- Feedback from partner organisations.
- Number of residents receiving unemployment benefits, (with the aim of seeing a reduction in this figure over time).
- Number of new homes for rent provided annually on Council owned sites.
- Number of entries to Council-owned leisure facilities by people holding concession memberships.

Social Resilience (Poverty) Dashboard

The council has created an East Devon dashboard of poverty indicators to provide visibility of locally relevant data, drawing on best practice from other councils and organisations. The council emphasised that this has been a key success of the strategy as it has given them a platform to fully understand the issues that they are facing. Issues can be visualised and contextualised, and information can be drawn from individual wards, enabling interventions to be targeted towards the most deprived areas. The dashboard is currently only available internally, but the council is working to make it available to the public.

Oversight and governance

Oversight of the strategy is the responsibility of two bodies, the Poverty Working Panel and the strategic management team. The Poverty Working panel report back to the cabinet on the delivery of the strategy, while the strategic management team of chief officers also oversee delivery.

Case Study 4

Cambridge City Anti-Poverty Strategy

Context

Cambridge City Council is a district council in the county of Cambridgeshire, in the East of England. Cambridge is a wealthy, fast-growing city with a strong economy and significant employment growth in the science and technology sectors. A study from Cambridge Ahead (2021) shows that companies that work in the knowledge-intensive industry accounted for 28% of employment and 38% of the total £18 billion turnover in Cambridge.

Nevertheless, Cambridge was identified by the Centre for Cities in 2017 as the most unequal city in the UK. There is a significant divide in the city- the top 6% of earners who live in Cambridge take home 19% of the total income generated by residents, while the bottom 20% of people account for just 2% of the total (Ferguson, 2020). A significant proportion of people are experiencing poverty due to low incomes, lack of skills and qualifications, and rapidly increasing housing costs. Poverty is concentrated in wards and neighbourhoods that are primarily in the North and East of the city.

Below we highlight key figures from the strategy which demonstrate that the city's prosperity is not shared by all:

- One in 10 people receive weekly pay (£162) which is less than 30% of the average weekly pay (£555) in the city.
- There is a low level of social mobility and outcomes are poor for young people from poorer backgrounds, with Cambridge having the fifth lowest score of any local authority for youth social mobility.
- In 2019, residents in the most deprived ward in Cambridge lived 11.6 years less on average than residents in the least deprived ward.

In light of this inequality, the council's vision 'One Cambridge - Fair for All' prioritises tackling poverty and social exclusion. The Corporate plan 2022-27 sets out the council's four key priorities, priority two 'tackling poverty and inequality and helping people in the greatest need' outlines the council's anti-poverty strategy and accompanying action plan for 2020 to 2023. The council's approach focuses on tackling both the underlying causes and immediate effects of poverty.

They have had two previous strategies covering the periods from 2014 to 2017 and 2017 to 2020, both strategies aimed to raise the standards of living for people in poverty and address the issues which lead to financial pressures. They highlight there have been improvements in a number of areas such as an increase in earnings for low-income households and building council-owned homes at an affordable rent.

However, the focus of the strategy's approach has changed over time and the revised strategy builds on learnings from previous strategies and the latest evidence on the nature of poverty in Cambridge. In particular, the council has recognised the need for a greater focus on preventative work in partnership with key local partners to address some of the root causes of poverty.

Scope and design

Vision

The strategy sets out the council's vision, *"we want to build a fairer Cambridge and help improve the standard of living for individuals and communities on a low income in the city"*.

Poverty definition and identification of the drivers of poverty in Cambridge

The council defines poverty using the most common definition which is relative income poverty-where households have less than 60% of median income.

The strategy outlines the causes and effects of poverty, combining the issues identified by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation with consultation responses from key local stakeholders and residents. The causes identified include:

- Difficulty meeting basic needs such as food and fuel costs
- Digital exclusion
- Low level of skills or education
- Impacts of welfare reforms
- Lack of financial literacy

Funding

The council emphasises that the availability of funding has been a challenge due to central government funding cuts which has meant discretionary funding is limited. The strategy is rooted in partnership working as the council recognises they need to work closely in partnership with local organisations and communities to develop creative solutions.

Therefore, the strategy primarily seeks to co-ordinate and re-focus city council activities so that it focuses on tackling poverty where possible. The council is funding the actions in the strategy by:

- Mainstream service budgets, through the council's mainstream services, either directly or in partnership with other organisations.
- Funding grants through the council's community grants and homelessness prevention grants to support voluntary and community organisations. For the period of the strategy, the criteria for grant funding are for projects that are working to address socio-economic disadvantage.

Development of the strategy

Partnership working

The previous strategies were developed through available data and evidence on poverty in Cambridge and extensive consultation with partner organisations and residents. The revised strategy has built on this evidence base, and the council has undertaken further consultation to develop a shared understanding of poverty, identify further opportunities for joint working and influence anti-poverty work in the city.

This has included:

- Engagement with residents at a range of community groups in Abbey, Arbury, Kings Hedges, and Trumpington (facilitated by Abbey People, North Cambridge Community Partnership, Hands on the Circle, and the council's community development team)
- A stakeholder workshop attended by representatives from 18 public, private, and voluntary sector organisations that support people in poverty
- Two workshops for council frontline staff who support residents in poverty and engagement with management teams in key council services (Community Services, Environmental Services, Housing Services, Planning, Repairs and Maintenance, and Revenues and Benefits)

Lived experience engagement

The council highlighted that engagement with people with lived experience of poverty has been on a consultation basis, but the council is now moving to a model of co-production for the development and delivery of interventions associated with the strategy. The council has found engagement has been most effective when they have worked through trusted organisations as they understand sometimes people do not want to speak directly to the local authority without an introduction from an organisation working with them in a support capacity.

Priorities

The strategy sets out three underpinning themes for the council's approach:

1. Combining ongoing efforts to address the effects of poverty, with a further focus on preventative work (in partnership with other organisations) to address some of the root causes of poverty. The council has evolved its approach; initially the council prioritised addressing the immediate effects of poverty, while they now have a greater focus on the causes of poverty.
2. Balancing direct council service delivery, partnership-working and influencing, and lobbying activity where it will have a greater impact. The council outlines its sphere of influence in relation to poverty. To ensure there is a clear understanding of the role everybody plays, the council is seeking to use the strategy to identify:
 - Which issues can be addressed by direct delivery by council services;
 - Which issues can be achieved through partnership working; and
 - Which issues require influencing and lobbying activity (where power lies with the central government) to bring about change and secure funding.
3. Building the capacity and resilience of residents and communities and facilitating community action. The council is focused on working collaboratively with residents, community groups, and voluntary groups to identify solutions to address poverty.

Strategic objectives

The strategy sets out five objectives to reduce poverty over three years and 58 associated actions structured around the strategy's underpinning themes (city council actions, partnership actions, and influencing and lobbying actions).

We outline the five objectives and a selection of key activities that will be undertaken to achieve them:

1. Helping people on low incomes to maximise their income and minimise their costs.

- City council actions: Paying council staff at least the Real Living Wage, and ensuring contractors do the same.

2. Strengthening families and communities, including supporting groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty.

- There are concentrations of poverty in particular localities in Cambridge, the council is working with partner organisations to develop area-based approaches, building on the county council-led "Think Communities" approach and other multi-agency initiatives.

3. Promoting an inclusive economy, by raising skills and improving access to a range of employment opportunities for people on low incomes.

- Influencing and lobbying actions: The council will lobby the government on relevant economic policy issues and seek to influence the strategic approach of the Greater Cambridge Partnership and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, which is responsible for key economic strategies including the Local Industrial Strategy and the Local Transport Plan.

4. Addressing the high cost of housing, improve housing conditions, and reduce homelessness.

- City council actions: The council has an ambitious programme to deliver at least 500 new council homes over 5 years following £70m funding via the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Devolution Deal.

5. Improving health outcomes for people on a low income.

- City council actions: Providing a 50% reduction in entry prices at Council-owned sports and swimming facilities for people receiving benefits.

Delivering the strategy

The action plan sets out the key activities that the council plans to undertake to help achieve each of the objectives. It highlights which actions will be achieved through direct service delivery, partnership working, or influencing and lobbying. It is a live document that is regularly reviewed and updated, with new activity added to respond to emerging issues relating to poverty in the city.

Responsibility

From the outset, the council aimed to ensure the strategy was embedded across all key services. The council's action plan highlights different council services have a responsibility for key actions to achieve the strategic objectives such as revenues and benefits, housing services and community services. The strategy brings together work that is already the responsibility of services, but challenges services to take forward additional activities and projects where issues have been identified.

The strategy emphasises that the city council cannot deliver work on its own. Through the development of the strategy, they have identified opportunities for joint working, and they are working closely with key local stakeholders to deliver the actions set out in the strategy.

Leadership

The strategy has high-level political support and leadership. The Assistant Chief Executive of the council leads on anti-poverty and there is an Executive Councillor for Equalities, Anti-Poverty and Well-being. The council highlights having an executive councillor with anti-poverty as a named responsibility provides council officers with a specific person to report to and supports political leadership on the council on the issue of poverty.

Links to other strategies

The council highlights that poverty is well-established as a key issue for the council, the strategy is cross-cutting, and many of the council's services have contributed to the development and delivery of the strategy, either through delivering actions or through re-focusing existing services. The strategy is not intended to replace existing strategies, rather it exists to complement, strengthen, and add to the work council departments are doing to address poverty. In particular, the strategy has clear links to, and aligns with the following strategies: Housing Strategy, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Local Plan.

Monitoring and evaluation

The action plan sets out performance measures, expected outcomes and completion dates for the 58 actions structured around the five strategic objectives and underpinning themes. The performance measures relate to the expected outputs from the actions. Where projects are in the early stages of development, or it is difficult to identify tangible outputs they have highlighted clear project milestones that will be achieved by the completion date.

The action plan includes the following types of performance measures and outcomes:

- Increasing the number of Cambridge employers that have achieved Living Wage accreditation.
- Increasing the number of community days held in low income areas of the city.
- Increasing the number of additional apprenticeships created across the Greater Cambridge area.
- Increasing the number of new homes for rent provided annually on council owned sites.
- Repurposing the existing library card as a 'smart' universal passport to learning.

Indicators for measuring poverty in Cambridge

Due to the difficulty in measuring levels of poverty at a local level the council has identified high-level indicators in the strategy that are used to measure poverty in Cambridge, structured around the five objectives of the strategy. The council highlights having a clear set of indicators is essential for them to monitor the combined impact of council and partner organisations actions on poverty, tracking changes in the local and national economy and measuring the effects of government policy on poverty.

Key measures include:

- Total number of people living in households claiming Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.
- Percentage of pupils receiving Free School Meals achieving Grades 9 to 4 in GCSE English and Maths.
- Gap in life expectancy between the least and most deprived areas in Cambridge.
- The percentage of households in Cambridge experiencing fuel poverty.

Oversight and governance

Progress on the key actions and performance measures are reported to the Strategy and Resources Committee on a regular basis. The council produces a public facing annual progress report that updates on the delivery of the key actions.

Case Study 5

Leicester City Anti-Poverty Strategy

Context

Leicester City Council is a unitary authority in the East Midlands city of Leicester. It has some of the most deprived communities in the country and is ranked the 32nd most deprived local authority in England (out of 317). Overall deprivation is primarily driven by deprivation in income, education, skills, and training:

- In Leicester, the average person earns £22,157 a year, a figure that has fallen by around £1,000 since 2013. In contrast, average earnings in England have risen by approximately £3,000 over the same period.
- 28% of Leicester's adult working population are residents in the 5% most deprived areas nationally. 52% are living in the 20% most deprived areas.
- A high proportion of residents in Leicester have no recognised qualifications, the percentage is 2.5 times higher than the national average.

When the City Mayor was re-elected in 2019, the Mayor's vision set out a number of pledges to fulfil ambitions to improve the city region. Under the 'A fair city' pledge was a commitment to 'fight against austerity' and develop an anti-poverty strategy in the first year of the new term. The development of the strategy was undertaken at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020; however, publication of the strategy was delayed until early 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The council highlights it is realistic in its approach to addressing poverty as many of the causes of poverty are driven by factors outside of local control. Nevertheless, the strategy is focused on enabling the council and its key partners to better understand the nature and impact of poverty on people that use their services to improve services and/or develop new ones.

We have chosen this case study as unlike the other strategies, the council did not want it to be a paper-based strategy. Instead, the council's anti-poverty framework and approach are on a microsite. The council emphasised that using a microsite allows for the strategy to be constantly updated as the national and local situation changes.

Scope and design

Vision

The council sets out its vision in the strategy, *"our vision is that every citizen of Leicester is happy, healthy, engaged in their community and not held back by poverty and its impacts"*.

Poverty definition and identification of the drivers of poverty in Leicester

The council defines poverty using the relative poverty definition- if a household's income is less than 60% of the average. They emphasise while all people in poverty have a lack of money, poverty means different things to different people. They state *"you are poor if you are unable to live at the standard that most other people would expect. A child can have three meals a day, warm clothes, and go to school, but still be poor because their parents do not have enough money to ensure they can live in a warm home, have access to a computer to do their homework, or go on the same school trips as their classmates"*.

The strategy cites a Joseph Rowntree Foundation report that concludes poverty levels are driven by changes to four main factors: employment rate, earnings, benefits, and other incomes such as pensions and housing costs (JRF, 2016). The strategy is structured around the policy of some of these factors that can be influenced at a local level.

Target population

It is important for the council to consider that poverty affects people in different ways. Leicester is home to a number of diverse communities, and as such services must be tailored to the appropriate community and their needs. The strategy is strongly aligned with the council's Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy 2018-2022 which requires all proposed service developments and changes to be assessed for their impact on groups of people with "protected characteristics". The strategy highlights the following groups that are at a higher risk of poverty in Leicester including children, social renters, home carers, the long-term sick or disabled, LGBT communities, women, ethnic groups, and older people.

Funding

The strategy does not have specific funding due to budgetary constraints. Instead, the council is focusing on maintaining funding for existing strategies and plans that are already in place to reduce poverty and offering grants to local organisations. When the council is making any changes to programmes due to funding, they now need to look at poverty data to assess what service decisions should be made. The council emphasised the strategy is about developing what is already in the city and making it sustainable.

They have launched an Anti-Poverty Community Grants scheme which offers grants to local organisations to develop and design projects that align with one or more of the council's anti-poverty objectives and deliver specific benefits to groups living in Leicester who are more at risk of living in poverty. £250,000 funding will be available each year from 2022 to 2025, and they are running multiple rounds of application.

Development of the strategy

To develop the strategy, the council spoke to over 500 people. They held a summit involving representatives from the council, NHS, advice agencies, voluntary and community organisations, and focus groups with people with lived experience of poverty. They used the engagement to understand the barriers people are facing living in poverty, gathered poverty data from a number of organisations, and mapped support services in the city.

Partnership working

The summit with key local partners highlighted a number of issues that the strategy needed to focus on improving including:

- Lack of awareness about the anti-poverty work of the council: the microsite now contains details on current and future council policies and funding.
- Limited access to data on poverty levels in Leicester: organisations faced difficulties in accessing data to support bids and could often spend significant time looking for this data. The microsite now holds data across poverty indicators the council has access to, alongside data collected by other organisations. This ensures this data is easily accessible to VCSE groups.

Lived experience engagement

The council held focus groups with people with lived experience of poverty to determine what residents felt an anti-poverty strategy should address and what schemes had been of benefit to them. One of the key findings that came out of the lived experience engagement was that residents felt there is a stigma attached to living in poverty, and they were hesitant to access services if they felt the language was 'demeaning' or 'belittling'. The council emphasised they are now more aware of the importance of using language that is empowering to residents rather than demoralising.

The council highlighted that the strategy could not have been developed without involving people with lived experience.

Priorities

The council has developed an anti-poverty framework to better understand the issues people experiencing poverty in Leicester are facing. Below we outline a summary of the four-ring strategic framework:

- It begins with the key elements that need to be in place for people to live a comfortable life to a standard that we all should expect, these include food and clothing, homes and furniture, money, and advice.
- "Enablers" then surround key elements, these include access to advice and services, childcare and schools, and transport.
- The themes of health and well-being and jobs and skills are the next ring, which can only be achieved when basic needs are met, or support is provided from "enablers". The council emphasises that the absence of any of the inner sections of the framework will have a negative effect on an individual's health, well-being, and social environment.
- Surrounding the whole framework is "community", the council recognises the importance of support from a strong social and community network. The microsite is structured around the strategic framework's key elements and enablers, and each includes key findings from engagement with local partners and people with lived experience of poverty, as well as actions the council is taking, and its future intentions.

A selection of the key actions and intentions are:

- Homes, furniture, and utilities: commissioning advice services in the community that support residents to manage their bills and access emergency gas and electricity credit; and providing seed funding for a voluntary sector project to refurbish white goods for low-income households.
 - Food and clothing: promoting and working to increase the take up of healthy start and free school meals by eligible families; providing seed funding for a project to reuse school uniform items around the city.
 - Money debt and advice: investing in an online platform (Betteroff) to provide guidance to increase benefit take up and help residents maximise their eligible benefit income; implementing a payday advance system for council staff experiencing financial difficulties.
- The strategy has five objectives, which are grouped around prevention, crisis support, short, medium, and long-term actions, and national lobbying.

1. Identifying services that support Leicester's residents to avoid falling into poverty.
2. Ensuring crisis information and services are easy to access and meet the needs of Leicester's residents and the staff/volunteers in organisations that support them.
3. Improving support to people experiencing poverty in the short and medium term, increasing choice and independence.
4. Improving systems and the infrastructure of support in the longer term
5. Campaigning and lobbying for change at a national level to alleviate poverty in the long term.

Delivering the strategy

Responsibility

The council emphasises that tackling poverty is not something the council can do alone, a theme which is key to the design of the strategy. They have received city wide support from a variety of organisations, including those in the business sector, who have recognised that they have got an important role to play in supporting employees in a variety of ways.

Anti-Poverty Partner Network

A key element of the strategy has been the formation of a network of anti-poverty partners. Partners who join the network commit to working towards the objectives of the strategy and submit their own action plan highlighting the work they are doing or plan to undertake and how they will measure impact to achieve the strategies objectives. The network is in its early days, but the aim is to create a city region that is full of organisations committed to combatting poverty and to strengthen collaboration between organisations. Once fully developed the council will publicise these actions to provide ideas for organisations that do not yet know how they can make a difference to addressing poverty. Partners will be asked to provide updates to the council on their progress to demonstrate impact.

Leadership

The anti-poverty strategy has high level political support and leadership. The Deputy Mayor is responsible for social care and anti-poverty and leads on the development and delivery of the strategy. The council emphasised that the strategy could not have gone forward in the way that it has without supportive political leadership. This leadership has had the effect of unlocking doors for council officers and generating greater buy-in from external organisations.

Links to other strategies

The council highlights that the strategy sits alongside and is underpinned by other strategies on the economy, climate emergency, health inequalities and Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy.

Monitoring and evaluation

The strategy was launched in early 2022, and as such the council has not yet monitored its impact. The council will be using quantitative and qualitative data to monitor the intended outcomes as they emphasise that quantitative data does not always show the full picture.

The first evaluation will be asking partners about the impact the strategy has had on the work they do in the city, as one of the key elements of the strategy is the development of a partners' network and upskilling organisations to adapt to the changing picture of poverty. The council wants to understand if the strategy has enabled a better understanding of poverty and greater sharing of best practice among partner organisations. Additionally, it will consider whether the provision of easily accessible data has helped local organisations in their anti-poverty work.

Oversight and governance

The council is forming a panel convened by council officers who will have oversight of the anti-poverty work across the city. They will be responsible for liaising with partners about anti-poverty work and assessing and accrediting new organisations and individuals who propose to deliver actions that meet the objectives set out in the strategy.

Scottish Borders Anti-Poverty Strategy

Context

The Scottish Borders is located in the South East of Scotland adjoining the border with England. The Scottish Borders face particular challenges due to its rurality, such as limited job opportunities and low incomes, restricted access to key services, an ageing demographic, and fuel deprivation. Below are key figures which depict the issues the Scottish Borders is facing:

- The dependency ratio is 70%, meaning that for every 1,000 people of working age there are 700 of non-working age. This is higher than the average in Scotland and is expected to increase.
- In 2021, the gross weekly full-time workplace-based wage in the Scottish Borders was £96 less per week than the average level for Scotland, making it the 2nd lowest of the 32 Scottish Local Authority areas.
- 29% of households are fuel-poor, equivalent to approximately 16,000 households. Of these households, 38% are older people and 51% live in social housing.

Of the six case studies, this is the only local anti-poverty strategy outside of England. We have chosen Scottish Borders as in Scotland there is legislation which requires Scottish local authorities and health boards to jointly prepare Local Child Poverty Action Plans detailing the activity they are taking and will take to contribute towards the Child Poverty targets set out in the Act ([see chapter one](#)).

However, the motivation for a dedicated anti-poverty strategy was that the council and different bodies such as the health board and housing associations were each trying to address poverty through different measures but there was no overall coordination. In September 2020, to bridge this gap three councillors brought a motion forward to the Scottish Borders council to develop an anti-poverty strategy and action plan.

The overarching strategy establishes a strategic framework to improve how the council and its partners collaborate to tackle the significant challenges associated with poverty reduction. The council emphasised that the Local Child Poverty Action Plan contains a wide range of actions that will contribute to achieving the outcomes set out in the strategy.

The council's anti-poverty strategy is not set in stone, the council and its partners will continually review what they do and change the strategy as circumstances require.

Scope and design

Vision

The council sets out the following vision in the strategy: *"We want a Scottish Borders where no-one lives in poverty and where everyone is able to achieve their full potential."*

We want the Scottish Borders to be a place where everyone can play their part in understanding that tackling poverty is everyone's responsibility. We believe that if we act locally, and in partnership, we can make a real difference.

We want this Scottish Borders Anti-Poverty Strategy to be pro-active, evidenced by real experience, and directed by need. Working with the people of the Scottish Borders, we aim to find solutions to poverty challenges which support them in a way that works best for them."

Poverty definition and identification of the drivers of poverty in the Scottish Borders

The council uses the Joseph Rowntree Foundation definitions of poverty - *"Poverty is when your resources are well below your minimum needs"* and *"Poverty means not being able to heat your home, pay your rent or buy essentials (e.g., a winter coat for a child, a fridge) for you or your children."*

The strategy sets out the three key drivers of poverty as identified by the Scottish Government: income from employment, costs of living, and income from social security. In addition to these drivers, the Scottish Borders focuses on the following factors, which 'contribute' to or 'compound' poverty.

- Fuel poverty
- Housing poverty
- Food poverty
- Health and wellbeing
- Connections to family, friends, and community
- Digital exclusion

Funding

There is no specific funding for the strategy, they have repurposed different forms of funding to support actions. This includes Covid-19 funding; in 2021/22 the council delivered an underspend which they directed into the reserves and are now releasing to support the Cost-of-living Crisis and strategy-related priorities. Cost-of-living Crisis funding has also been directed towards the strategy.

Priorities

The strategy is underpinned by seven guiding principles. These include respect, resilience, person-focused, fairness, sustainability, shared, and communication.

The strategy is organised around six themes and eleven outcomes that the council and its partners are focused on achieving to help reduce poverty. The themes 'pockets, prospects, and places' have been structured around the Scottish Government's Child Poverty Strategy measurement framework while 'people', 'partnerships', and 'pathways' have been chosen based on what the council and its partners recognise as being important to address poverty (Scottish Government, 2014). The accompanying action plan is designed to meet the outcomes listed below:

- Maximising income and reducing out-going costs of households (pockets);
- Attainment and achievement for children and young people to enable them to reach their potential; households are sustaining employment and re-skilling to enable them to seek alternative employment; health inequalities are being reduced and wellbeing is being promoted (prospects);
- Everyone lives in warm, affordable homes; affordable, convenient transport; digital connectivity for everyone (places);
- Increase opportunities and empower people to fully participate in their communities to bring about change; tackling poverty is everyone's responsibility (people);
- Improve partnership working and networks to plan and deliver better services (partnerships): and
- Develop and implement pathways to support people to move from dependence to independence (pathways).

Development of the strategy - Anti-Poverty Working Group

In 2020, the council approved a motion setting up an anti-poverty working group to develop a draft strategy and action plan. The working group agreed on a vision: "We want a Scottish Borders where no one lives in Poverty and we want everyone to be able to achieve their full potential and feel healthy, happy, and valued".

To develop the draft strategy, they took the following approach:

- Data and evidence gathering: the council examined and analysed relevant data and information on poverty in the Scottish Borders to understand the best approach to tackle poverty and identify where support is needed most.
- Partnership working: the council worked with key local partners including Citizens Advice Borders, Registered Social Landlords, Service Managers, the Third Sector Interface, and other voluntary organisations to ensure that appropriate issues were identified and included in the Strategy.
- Identifying best practice: Scottish Borders researched approaches that have been taken to tackle anti-poverty in other local authority areas.

The draft strategy was approved in February 2021. However, the council recognised that the draft strategy had been developed from a mainly internal perspective, and therefore to finalise the strategy and action plan they held public consultation with key local partners, communities, and other organisations.

Partnership working

Involving people with lived experience of poverty was vital to finalise the development of the strategy and action plan. The council co-produced the consultation with organisations that are directly involved in supporting those in poverty. This helped the council to understand the most appropriate form of consultation and consider potential questions to identify further actions that could be included in the strategy. They emphasised that lived experience involvement is ongoing to inform decision-making and to ensure the appropriate actions are included in the action plan.

The 'inform' consultation was undertaken from March to May 2021 and involved two public surveys. One was designed in relation to the draft strategy and the other was to inform the council about residents' current lived experience of poverty compared to pre-covid.

A summary of the key findings of both surveys is detailed below:

- Respondents emphasised that the vision of the strategy could be more ambitious, with more of a focus on education, infrastructure, chronic health, climate change, housing, and transport.
- Respondents identified additional opportunities for the council such as promoting the Living Wage more widely.
- Compared to pre-covid, respondents were managing less well financially, while awareness of available support was low in some areas and travel was highlighted as an increasing issue.

The council also sought feedback from Scottish Border Community Planning Partners which includes a number of strategic partners operating locally such as NHS Borders, Scottish Fire and Rescue, Borders College, four local housing associations, and voluntary sector organisations.

The council highlighted that their engagement with partner organisations and the wider community had enabled them to better understand the issues residents are facing and the importance of joint working. It highlighted a widespread lack of awareness of available support among the local community, and people were unsure how to access the help available. The strategy has enabled Scottish Borders to better promote and raise awareness of the support available, making it easier for people to get the help they need.

Moreover, they found that there was a lack of coordination and duplication across organisations particularly those working on financial inclusion. The council has now set up a financial inclusion practitioners' group that meets quarterly to discuss best practice. They aim to identify any gaps in the provision of support and consider further opportunities for closer working.

Delivering the strategy

The strategy is being delivered through the action plan. The action plan is structured around the themes of the strategy and desired outcomes and reflects the challenges and opportunities they have identified. They recognise that existing plans and strategies contribute significantly to meeting the outcomes, therefore they have been aligned to each of the outcomes set within the action plan. The council highlights they are measuring the impact of the actions taken for each outcome. The action plan is a live document and new actions are continuing to be developed as part of the work of the anti-poverty member's reference group.

Responsibility

The council highlights that tackling poverty is everybody's business. There is widespread acceptance throughout the council that every department that has relevance to people's well-being has a responsibility to consider poverty. They emphasised that many of the actions in the action plan are already underway as part of service delivery carried out by the council and key local partners, such as multi-agency Community Assistance Hubs, Resilient Community teams, and the Scottish Border Community Planning Partners.

Leadership

The strategy has cross-party support, with the council emphasising that anti-poverty has not been a point of contention but has always had support to drive work forward. There is an Executive Member for Communities and Equalities who has poverty as a named responsibility.

Links to other strategies

The strategy highlights that there are key plans and strategies in existence that contribute to reducing poverty in the Scottish Borders. They outline eight that include: Child Poverty Report Action Plan 2021/22, Affordable Warmth and Home: Energy Efficiency Strategy 2019-2023, and Scotland's Public Health Priorities. They emphasise that the strategy is not intended to replace work that is already been done, but rather to coordinate and strengthen work that the council and its partners are currently doing.

Monitoring and evaluation

The strategy outlines how its impacts will be monitored and evaluated. It highlights that the measurement indicators are not set in stone and work is continuing to develop an appropriate measurement framework.

They will monitor and evaluate in a variety of ways:

- The Covid-19 recovery matrix/index will be used as a baseline.
- Partners will provide updates as part of regular progress reporting of the action plan.
- Existing indicators in other plans and strategies will be reported where they relate to the action plan.
- A longer-term assessment of the impact of the strategy will be conducted. The council will focus on what has been done, how successful it has been, and what other possible plans and interventions could be added to the strategy. This will be used to make recommendations for future strategy development.

Oversight and governance

Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group

The members reference group has replaced the anti-poverty strategy working group. This has been set up to monitor the implementation of the strategy and action plan. It is made up of seven elected members of the council, appointed on a non-partisan basis. They also receive input from the council's partners and other organisations and individuals, including those with lived experience of poverty. They give guidance to officers and report to the council as necessary. This aims to ensure that the strategy remains appropriate to address identified current or emerging issues as well as being realistic and achievable. They meet on a quarterly basis (as a minimum) and an annual progress report is presented to the council.

Focus group findings and implications

In this chapter, we present the findings from the lived experience focus group and we consider the implications this has for developing a good local anti-poverty strategy.

The findings below are presented according to the five main topics covered in the focus group: (i) the need for local anti-poverty strategies: what should the priority areas of concern be for local authorities; (ii) the impact of local anti-poverty efforts currently; (iii) suggestions on how local authorities can improve support, services, and programmes to reduce poverty and (iv) the barriers to participation in local decision-making.

The need for local anti-poverty strategies: what should the priority areas of concern be for local authorities?

Participants highlighted that poverty is a restrictive and constraining experience. There was a significant focus on the difficulties in accessing support from local authorities and when they did receive support it failed to adequately meet their needs. These experiences were emphasised as being recurring and entrenching the poverty they experience.

Theme 1 - Access to council services

Participants shared experiences of difficulty in accessing support from local authorities, in particular: money, debt, and benefits advice. A number of barriers were mentioned, but the majority of participants agreed that there is a lack of awareness about the support that local authorities offer. There was a sense that local authorities should be actively reaching out to support people rather than waiting for people to come to them.

“You don’t get to know about [the support schemes] until someone tells you about it or someone’s claimed it already. The services that are there, they won’t tell you what you’re allowed to claim or access”

Several participants indicated that when they had reached out to council services for support, they had experienced council staff being unaware of support available to people due to a lack of clear support structures.

“I have, and know people who have, had many experiences where even people who worked at the council didn’t know what they could offer you because there were that many different things and they were in that many different places that they literally couldn’t connect you to what you needed because they didn’t even know about it”.

Moreover, participants described local authorities’ strict eligibility criteria as a major area of concern as it prevents people from getting the support they need.

“If it’s some sort of blanket policy of ‘this is what we’re doing for particular people in need’ there are certain people whose circumstances are going to preclude them from it”.

“The first question you get asked is whether you’re in social housing, and I’m not... If you’re in social housing the access to services is a whole different thing”

Participants highlighted council staff are under great pressure due to organisational capacity, targets, and time pressures which they felt leaves local authorities “not on people’s side”.

“[The council] offer all these things and they’re so scared to advertise them in case it’s used up fully so they don’t even let people know about these things in case the budget is used up completely for it”.

“I applied for the additional support, and they said that I didn’t fit the criteria when I did. It was just that the workers that work in the council are too overwhelmed, the caseloads are too big, they can’t give you the right help that they’re there to give you, they’re under pressure to meet targets and stick to policies rather than give the help that you need, so they’re under pressure. So, they try and help people but they put barriers in the way to exclude you”.

These barriers contribute to a worsening experience of poverty and isolation from support.

The impact of local anti-poverty efforts currently

Participants described experiences of poor treatment and discriminatory practices by local councils, which they were reluctant to engage with due to expectations of stigmatisation and rejection. Participants also highlighted there is a lack of coordination between local council services and external partners who are offering support in the local community.

Theme 2 - Experience of stigma and discrimination

Participants reported feeling stigmatised by their local councils, they shared negative experiences of not being listened to, spoken down to, and receiving inconsistent support. These experiences reduced trust in the council and led to a lack of motivation to seek support as participants felt strongly that local councils had an “us and them”.

“The shame of being in poverty, that stigma that’s attached to it, I think the council needs to break that down and not make people feel like they’re a worthless part of society or beggars or inferior.... They make you feel like you can’t get that help and that you’re begging”

“Of course, help is available, but in a contemptuous way, we need to sacrifice our self esteem to get that help”

“[The council services are] gaslighting residents to make them feel they are unworthy of support. Would need to build trust.”

“Some families and very especially single parent families are deeply concerned about revealing their state of poverty for fear of their children being taken into care because they cannot long provide for their children”

Theme 3 - A lack of coordination between a range of services

A lack of coordination between council services, national agencies, and external local partners was noted by several of the participants. They had experiences of information being lost, actions not being delivered, and being “bounced” between services. Participants reiterated the need for local councils to strengthen their collaboration with external partners to support coordinated action to address poverty in their local communities.

“I certainly feel there needs to be a co-ordinated response, people working together. I mean I’ve heard a lot about people going from one agency to another and having to chase around to get answers to questions”

“I think councils could also benefit from communicating more closely with other poverty related agencies that are directly involved in providing any kind of support to those in poverty.”

“You can’t judge people on just a bit of paperwork so you need to go to them, you need to sit down with them, you’ve got to stop making them go to twenty different places, go to them and save them money and save you money and get the assessment done properly the first time so you don’t have to get them to do eight different assessments and send them down the road of suicide...”

“Councils should be coordinating initiatives to tackle poverty, but they don’t.”

Suggestions on how local authorities can improve support, services, and programmes to reduce poverty

When reflecting on how local authorities can improve support, services and programmes to reduce poverty, participants felt that short-term responses to poverty are insufficient. Instead, local authorities should focus on the root causes of poverty and how they can use their power to reduce poverty in the long term.

Theme 4 - Focus on the long-term

Participants emphasised the need for local councils to have a long-term vision and invest in preventative measures to reduce poverty. They highlighted that emergency support provision is necessary, but this should not be the only measure taken by local authorities. Participants expressed that preventing and reducing poverty requires developing an economic vision that enables people on low incomes to be better connected with job opportunities.

“I think preventative work should be the order of the day and whenever possible early intervention should be a top priority”.

“I think the most important thing is... to prevent rather than do the firefighting...”

“Handing out little pockets of money here and there doesn’t help in the long run so there needs to be solutions”

“It’s alright helping people out with the financial difficulty when they’re in financial difficulty but it’s maybe, need to be thinking about lifting people out of poverty and giving people meaningful work”.

The barriers to participation in local decision making

The participants highlighted local authorities should seek to develop long-term relationship-building and co-production methods with the communities’ policies impact. Instead of “talking shop”, there should be transparency about how the process of engagement leads to policy changes.

Theme 5 - Meaningful co-production

Participants were keen to be involved in local decision-making, and they expressed local authorities should increase opportunities for communities to be involved.

“What we really needed is for people to stop making decisions for areas where they’ve not lived. The council needs to speak to people who live there to actually understand what issues there are.”

However, several participants described experiences of being involved in community initiatives with the aim of putting the voice of people with lived experience of poverty in council decisions and policymaking. They highlighted that while councils listened well, there were limited examples of how engagement had made a tangible impact on policy.

This was identified as a barrier to future engagement with councils as participants were concerned that their participation made no meaningful difference.

“They always listen to you and all that but it’s like, they’re so up against it and they really do want to help, but it’s like going to challenge a government that’s not really there to help you anyway”.

“So, you feel like your voice is just falling on deaf ears because nothing’s changing”.

Furthermore, participants felt that there were accessibility and inclusivity issues that were barriers to meaningful community engagement. They conveyed that community engagement was not representative of the communities they live in and led to the same participants being involved.

“I’ve seen over time that they’ve just limited the amount of people they bring on so it’s really unequal, you know me sat in a two-hour meeting with the two Mayors and CEOs of companies and charities and it’s just me there with lived experience and my friend that I do it with”.

Summary of themes for consideration

The findings from the focus group support and build on the existing literature about what a good anti-poverty strategy should include and raise a number of ideas about how local authorities can develop an anti-poverty strategy that is effective.

The overall themes accumulated in the focus group highlight that for local anti-poverty strategies to be effective local authorities to develop a person-centred approach. This means councils need to commit to ensuring that people with lived experience of poverty and those working on the frontline can shape the development, delivery, and implementation of anti-poverty strategies.

The findings indicated that anti-poverty strategies can be the vehicle to ensure there is a clear understanding in communities of support available

(theme 1). Local authorities have a duty to tackle the stigma associated with poverty, and anti-poverty strategies should challenge the stigma and set out actions for change (theme 2). Anti-poverty strategies must be developed in collaboration with key external stakeholders to ensure there is joined up working to support people in the most effective way (theme 3). The focus of anti-poverty strategies must be on developing long-term solutions to reduce and prevent poverty, whilst recognising the need to provide effective emergency financial support (theme 4). Finally, it is central that engagement with people with lived experience of poverty is focused on co-production rather than ‘listening’. Participation should be meaningful and there should be mechanisms for measuring the efficacy and direct impact of voices of lived experience (theme 5).

Tameside Poverty Truth Commission (PTC)

Poverty Truth Commissions (PTCs) create a space to meaningfully bring together people with different experiences, knowledge, and power: within this space, people who have had the experience of living in poverty come together with senior civic, political, and business leaders on an equal footing. They seek to discover the answer to the question “What if people who struggled against poverty were involved in making decisions about tackling poverty?”

We ran the Tameside Poverty Truth Commission from October 2021 to November 2022; we published a report with the findings and recommendations, they closely aligning with the focus group findings (GMPA, 2022b). This has been an incredibly powerful process in Tameside and is already leading to significant change, including lived experience representation on key decision-making bodies.

The recommendations included:

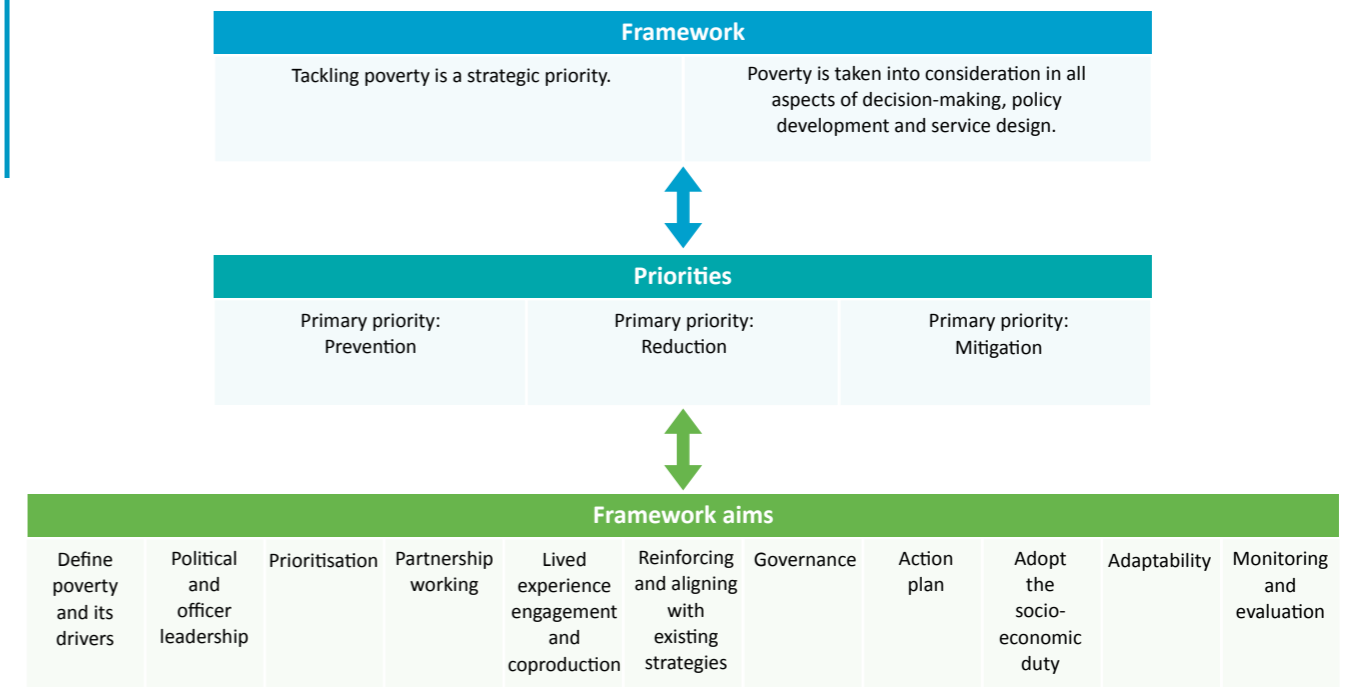
- A Tameside Poverty Charter should be created, with a commitment to include involving people with lived experience of poverty in decision-making and providing poverty awareness training to frontline and other relevant staff. Organisations across Tameside should commit to this Charter.
- Poverty awareness training should be developed in Tameside with lived experience input, and including real stories of poverty, for staff in support services and relevant organisations.
- Organisations across Tameside should establish meaningful lived experience processes to influence decision making. A public directory should be maintained of these opportunities.
- Support services in Tameside should co-operate and better share information, to ensure there is “no wrong door” for accessing support.
- Support services in Tameside should provide skilled single points of contact to support people with complex needs, through effective referrals, not signposting. People living in poverty should not need to repeat their story.

Conclusion

In this final chapter, we bring together the key elements identified through the literature review and research findings and present a refined framework. We suggest the following framework which an anti-poverty strategy needs to have to maximise its effectiveness. This framework is intended to be of use to local authorities seeking to develop or refresh an anti-poverty strategy.

An anti-poverty strategy will only be successful if it is supported by the elements identified in this framework. All these elements are complementary and interdependent.

Chapter 6



1. Define poverty and its drivers

Local authorities need to develop a clear, agreed definition of poverty and its drivers. Creating a shared understanding of poverty is the cornerstone for action as it will enable both internal and external stakeholders to understand their role in tackling it and it is important to challenge negative perceptions of people living in poverty.

Although the concept of poverty is contested and there is no single definition that is universally accepted, there is a broad consensus that poverty is fundamentally about a lack of material resources with income as the best proxy measure (Work and Pensions Committee, 2019). Therefore, local authorities should define poverty using a relative understanding.

Townsend (1979, p.31) defines individuals and groups as living in poverty, “where they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies in which they belong”.

By adopting a relative understanding local authorities are acknowledging the need to take steps to ensure that residents have the things they need to participate fully in society and have a happy and fulfilled life. This will instil in stakeholders the importance of moving away from interventions that simply meet people’s basic physical needs, towards interventions that deliver more profound outcomes for individuals.

Local authorities can use the statistics available at a national level on the number of children living in relative low income by local area. Relative poverty is defined as children living in households where the income is 60% or less of the average (median) household income (after housing costs) (DWP, 2022). This should be supplemented with a broader range of national data that can be disaggregated locally.

However, it is fundamental that local authorities use a basket of indicators, that are locally relevant and practical. This means local authorities need to build a robust evidence base using a range of local, national, and partnership working information to tell the most detailed local story and identify where the biggest issues are. This must be done at the very start of the strategies development to set measurements for long-term planning and monitoring progress.

Drivers of Poverty

It is important to clearly identify the main drivers that limit people’s ability to meet their basic needs and to participate fully in society. Poverty is largely about insufficient access to adequate financial resources, i.e., a lack of money.

Local authorities should focus on the three key drivers of poverty - income from employment, costs of living, and income from social security and benefits in kind (detailed in Fig 2). Although addressing these drivers requires action from the

national government, local authorities and key local stakeholders have a critical role in combating their influence.

Local action to address poverty needs to prioritise boosting household income and increasing access to financial resources. This is the most effective means of reducing poverty and preventing people from facing a financial crisis both in the short- and long term.

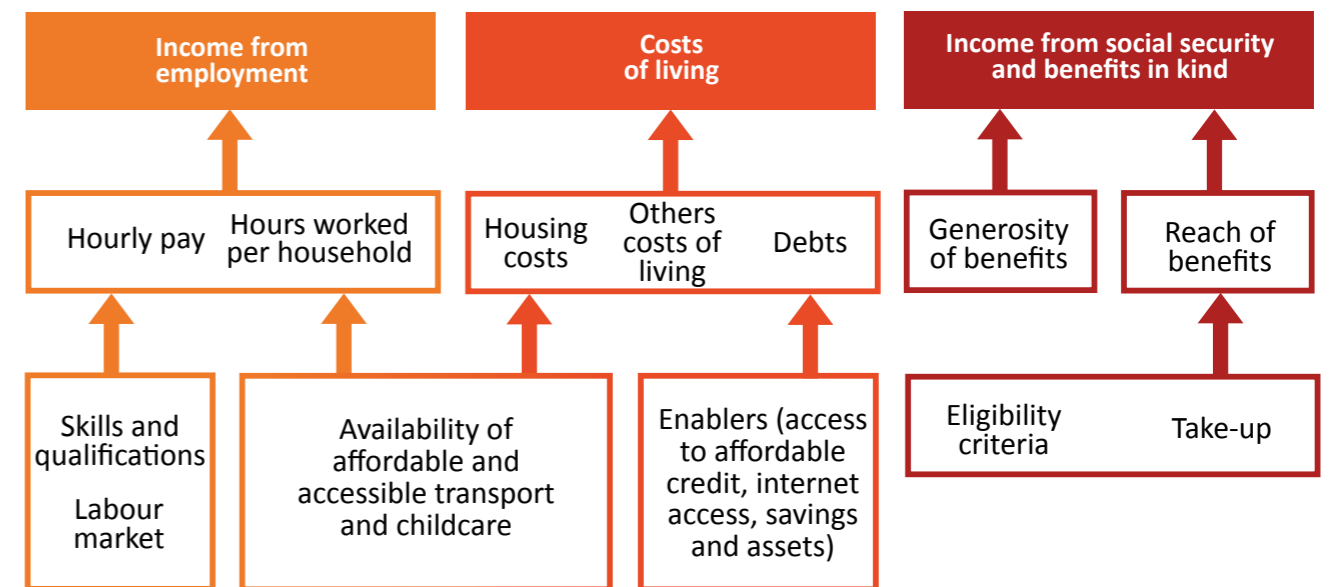


Figure 2: Drivers of Poverty (Adapted from the National Improvement Service).

Local authorities should use these drivers as the basis for assessing the actions required in their local area. However, local authorities should develop a comprehensive poverty profile to understand the nature of the drivers relevant to their area to ensure actions are targeting local needs.

Recommendations

- Clearly define poverty in a way that recognises it is relative as well as absolute and that recognises poverty is largely about insufficient access to financial resources. This ensures there is a shared understanding and serves as a reference for efficient and effective solutions.
- Use a relative income measure as the headline indicator for measuring poverty but supplement it with a broader range of indicators.

- For clarity on the action required to make a difference, local authorities should focus on the three main drivers of poverty - income from employment, costs of living, and income from social security and benefits in kind. However, we encourage local authorities to develop a detailed local poverty profile that examines the key drivers of poverty in their area to understand the measures that are most relevant in their locality.

- Promote awareness of poverty and the effects of poverty and provide training to council staff.
- Work with partners and lobby the government to tackle stigma and discrimination against people living in poverty.

2. Political and officer leadership

For an anti-poverty strategy to be effective, political and officer leadership is crucial to drive ambition and ensure effective operational working, delivery of the intended outcomes of the strategy and strong communication with local communities on what work councils are doing to tackle poverty. Clear leadership that names poverty as a portfolio responsibility can help build cultural change across councils, and avoid poverty being included under the catch all of 'inequality'. This is essential to raise awareness and drive action to address poverty.

3. Focus on prevention, reduction, and mitigation

An anti-poverty strategy must have at its core objectives and actions that focus on preventing and reducing poverty. Strategies should adopt medium and long-term actions and prioritise objectives that are based on a long-term perspective. The case studies have focused on maximising household income, building inclusive economies, and delivering more social and affordable housing to improve long-term outcomes.

While it is critically important the focus of an anti-poverty strategy is on prevention and reduction, an anti-poverty strategy also needs to articulate how the council is supporting people in an immediate financial crisis. Local authorities need to strengthen their local welfare provision as at best they not only mitigate the immediate financial crisis but also help find sustainable pathways out of poverty.

Even though the future of local welfare assistance funding is uncertain, there are practical options that can help councils make full use of funding that is available to support people facing financial hardship. At GMPA, we have worked with local authorities and their partners to maximise the effectiveness of local welfare assistance schemes to support people facing financial crisis. We have identified a number of proactive measures that local authorities can take that would immediately improve access to support and outcomes for residents in financial crisis (GMPA, 2022c). These include:

Recommendations

- Active committed leadership on poverty is required to drive change, coordinate strategic and policy responses, and provide a clear point of contact and accountability route for external stakeholders. Local authorities need to have a permanent senior officer and political leadership to address poverty as it is a long-standing issue and thus requires a high level of commitment to drive an anti-poverty strategy.

- A cash-first approach to local welfare provision. This approach maximises dignity, choice, and control for recipients of support. It reflects that lack of income is the primary cause of financial hardship and avoids the normalisation of VCSE lead 'in kind' crisis support.

- Schemes should be resident-focused, identifying a clear and sustainable pathway out of poverty rather than simply offering a one-off transactional piece of support.

- Partnership working both within the council and with external partners is vital to ensure there is awareness of local welfare assistance scheme provision and so that schemes sit within a wider, clearly identified support offer to financially vulnerable residents. Partnership working should be built upon the principle of 'cash first' so that agencies can work together to ensure people are accessing all the financial support that is available.

Recommendations

- A medium and long-term perspective is needed that includes actions that prevent and reduce the root causes of poverty.

- Focus on mitigating the impact of poverty through strengthening local welfare assistance schemes. Local authorities and their partners need to take a cash-first and advice-first approach as the most appropriate and dignified forms of support for people facing, or who are at risk of financial crisis.

- Commit to multi-year ring-fenced local welfare assistance scheme funding to protect the most vulnerable from financial hardship.

4. Prioritisation

Local anti-poverty strategies should not look like 'shopping lists', councils need to recognise their limitations and include a focus on lobbying the central government for wider changes to address poverty.

A strategy should be prioritised to ensure implementation is feasible. It should clearly state what councils and local partners could and should achieve moving beyond general statements and move to clearer statements against which progress can genuinely be measured.

Recommendations

- Clearly identify where local authorities, partners and stakeholders can have the greatest impact based on local evidence.

- Lobbying and influencing central government should be an essential aspect of a strategy.

5. Partnership working

An anti-poverty strategy will not be effective without local authorities working in partnership with external partners and communities. Local authorities need to engage with local stakeholders to clarify requirements and expectations on how best to work together to achieve the objectives set out in the strategy. This is essential to share best practice and avoid duplication in terms of policy and programmes being delivered and the investment of resources to support those most in need.

Recommendations

- Establish anti-poverty partnership groups with local stakeholders to set out the strategic vision of an anti-poverty strategy and the nature of the role of partners in addressing poverty.

6. Lived experience engagement and co-production

Lived experience engagement is key to the development of an effective anti-poverty strategy, people with lived experience of poverty are best placed to challenge the existing ways of working and ensure that anti-poverty efforts are centred around the needs of the community. Effective engagement takes time, patience, planning and should be run by external partners, as local authorities are often not seen as a potential solution but as a danger.

Recommendations

- Create the conditions needed for people to fully participate in the development process of an anti-poverty strategy that is meaningful and has a demonstrable impact.
- Develop community-based monitoring mechanisms for the strategy to ensure that policies implemented, and local concerns are translated into action.

7. Reinforcing and aligning with existing strategies

An anti-poverty strategy should not sit in isolation. Poverty is cross-cutting and is directly related to other strategies and plans that seek to improve the outcomes for those on the lowest incomes. An anti-poverty strategy should not repeat activity that other plans and strategies are doing, rather it should streamline and show how actions/policies are integrating with the whole of council activity. This will save valuable time and resources.

Recommendations

- Tackling poverty needs to be incorporated in existing strategies rather than operating as 'ad-hoc' to existing commitments and services. There needs to be a strong focus on tackling poverty in corporate strategies, economic strategies, housing, and equality policies to ensure that this is a focus of everything councils do and aligns budgets, members' portfolios, and activities.

8. Governance

Good governance is necessary for an effective anti-poverty strategy. This should be both internal (for example a working panel or committee) and external (for example local strategic partnerships) to the council. They should be responsible for monitoring progress and overseeing the implementation of the strategy.

Recommendations

- Anti-poverty strategies should be subject to both internal and external governance.

9. Action plan

Actions to deliver the aims and objectives of the anti-poverty strategy need to be kept under review, so the strategy should be accompanied by an action plan. This should set out current and future actions, timelines, and milestones, who is responsible for the actions (council, local stakeholders or lobbying/influencing the government). This should review progress on an annual basis. Councils need to report honestly on how they are performing against the targets and milestones, and action plans are important for refreshing the agenda.

Recommendations

- Accompanying an anti-poverty strategy should be a high-level action plan to increase efficiency and accountability.

10. Adopt the socio-economic duty

To support the effectiveness of an anti-poverty strategy, local authorities should voluntarily adopt the socio-economic duty.

The socio-economic duty contained in Section 1 of the Act requires public authorities to actively consider the way in which their decisions increase or decrease inequalities that result from socio-economic disadvantage. Successive governments have chosen not to enact the duty and socio-economic disadvantage is often missing from equality impact assessments that include consideration of other protected characteristics.

In the absence of action at a UK government level, equivalent legislation has been introduced in Scotland (known as the “Fairer Scotland Duty”) and in Wales.

GMPA has been working with local and combined authorities to increase the awareness and voluntary adoption of the duty as a means of creating better outcomes for those with lived experiences of poverty. It has been positive to see some Greater Manchester councils (and a number of councils in other parts of the country) adopting the duty or in the process of doing so.

Adoption of the duty will deliver a number of benefits that will complement and strengthen an anti-poverty strategy:

- Improve outcomes for local people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
- Support cross-organisational and cross-departmental working.
- Raise awareness of socio-economic inequalities within organisations and among partners.
- Ensure widespread organisational commitment to, and consideration of, socioeconomic inequalities.
- Support the participation of low-income residents in decisions that affect them, especially in the context of (proposed) cuts to services.
- Achieve greater consistency in practice and an increased likelihood of maintaining such consistent practice across political administrations and between changes of individual leadership and turnover of staff.
- Improve systematic approaches to equality impact assessments and assessments of policy and practice more broadly.
- Strengthen systematic data gathering and analysis, especially in the conduct of equality impact assessments, thereby strengthening accountability.
- Support the effective and efficient allocation of resources.

What adoption of the duty means in practise?

In 2021, GMPA and Just Fair published a guide developed in partnership with several organisations for local authorities and combined authorities on socio-economic duty implementation.

In adopting the socio-economic duty local authorities should:

Complete a meaningful impact assessment: Formally incorporate poverty and socio-economic disadvantage, alongside the existing nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010, in equality impact assessments, equality plans, and the broader decision-making process and strategies.

Use data effectively: Use a range of relevant data, including quantitative and qualitative, to inform the implementation of the socio-economic duty and develop clear success criteria to measure the impact of the implementation.

Have visible leadership: Ensure that implementation of the socio-economic duty enjoys strong and visible commitment from senior leaders, as part of a broader cultural shift

that embeds the priority to tackle socio-economic disadvantage at all levels of decision-making within the organisation.

Work in partnership with people with lived experience of poverty: Recognise the value of engaging with people with lived experience of socio-economic disadvantage and commit to finding new and sustainable ways to incorporate diverse expertise in policymaking to achieve successful outcomes.

Engage with key local stakeholders: Collaborate with residents, civil society, and voluntary and community sector organisations to build awareness and understanding of the socio-economic duty and people’s lived experience of socio-economic disadvantage, facilitate participative consultation and develop strategies to tackle socio-economic disadvantage together.

Ensure access to justice and monitoring impact and compliance: Identify what works through monitoring and evaluation, skill-sharing and innovation and introduce mechanisms that can embed accountability for the implementation of the socio-economic duty within local authorities.

11. Adaptability

An anti-poverty strategy cannot “standstill”, for it to serve its purpose it should be viewed as adaptable, rather than a collection of actions that should be rigidly adhered to.

Recommendations

- Anti-poverty strategies should be continuously reviewed to ensure that they are accountable and adaptable to the needs of local communities as circumstances change.

12. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are critical to understand whether the actions set out in the strategy are making a difference, they ensure the most effective and efficient use of resources and enable adjustments to be made where necessary.

This is by no means a simple and straightforward task and there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to monitoring and evaluation but there are some aspects that are important. Monitoring requires careful planning to ensure it fulfils its purpose effectively. Local authorities should use a range of key local indicators that have been identified, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, local knowledge, learning from other local authorities, and national data. However, whilst it is important to use quantitative metrics, numerical data on its own may not show the full impact of local actions. Hence, it is imperative that local authorities capture qualitative data, working with local partners and people with lived experience of poverty to understand what is or is not making a difference. Evaluation of an anti-poverty strategy requires a mix of light-touch annual reviews and longer-term impact reporting.

Recommendations

- Identify a clear set of metrics against which progress in addressing poverty can be tracked. Work collaboratively with key local stakeholders to identify the data and evidence gaps and areas of duplication and seek to address these together.
- Develop a public-facing dashboard that highlights local poverty indicators to help understand the local population specific to poverty.
- Facilitate community and civil engagement in the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy. People with lived experience of poverty need to be asked how the impact of anti-poverty policies should be measured.

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