

ANTI-POVERTY OBJECTIVES 2024 - 2027

Report of the Director of Public Health

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Council's Fair and Inclusive programme is about tackling poverty and inequality. Our vision is that: "Stockport is a great, diverse place to live, where everyone can thrive".
- 1.2 Just as our equality, diversity and inclusion priorities are set out in our published Equality Objectives, these Anti-poverty Objectives set out our priorities for tackling poverty. Together, both sets of objectives encapsulate our Fair and Inclusive programme.
- 1.3 To achieve these objectives, a fair and inclusive approach needs to be embedded across the Council and our wider partners: public sector bodies, businesses, voluntary and community organisations and local people working together as One Stockport.
- 1.4 The draft Anti-Poverty Objectives were brought to Scrutiny on 20 November 2023 as an appendix to the Anti-Poverty Update. Since then, there has been a process of engagement and consultation and the anti-poverty objectives have been reviewed by all Council Senior Management Teams (SMTs), by Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), and by the Cross Party Fair & Inclusive Working Group.
- 1.5 This revised set of objectives are being re-presented to the Committee today for approval prior to being taken to Cabinet.

2. CONTEXT

- 2.1 The UK is currently experiencing a cost of living crisis which has followed hard on the heels of the Covid 19 pandemic. National government resources such as the Household Support Fund will no longer be available to local authorities which are already struggling with increasing demand for core services. Stockport Council is committed to supporting residents who need advice or who are experiencing a financial crisis, and will seek to deliver this in the most efficient and effective way possible given increasing levels of need and a reduction in resources available.
- 2.2 Stockport has an estimated 49,000 people living in poverty based on national figures, around 17% of the population¹. 26.6% of children in Stockport are living in poverty according to figures for 21/22 from the End Child Poverty Coalition. The

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-for-financial-years-ending-1995-to-2022>

borough is still recovering from the negative economic impact of Covid and is now facing a cost of living crisis being driven by high inflation especially of essentials such as food and energy. National research from the Resolution Foundation in November 22 found that 23% of adults said they couldn't afford to replace or repair major electrical goods up from 8% pre-pandemic, and 11% said that they were hungry but didn't eat because of a lack of money in the past month compared with 5% pre-pandemic. A recent report from the Joseph Rountree Foundation, has evidence that approximately 3.8 million people in the UK experienced destitution in 2022, including around 1 million children².

- 2.3 Stockport is the ninth most polarised borough in England, with deprived areas having lower than average education, health and employment outcomes, leading to significant inequalities which damage the life opportunities of our residents. Poverty causes ill health, drives inequality in health outcomes and increases use of health, children's and adult social care services³. There is a gap of almost 12 years in life expectancy between those living in the most deprived and least deprived wards in Stockport. People in deprived areas spend more years in fair or poor health compared to those in other areas, and the average healthy life expectancy in the most deprived areas is 55 years.
- 2.4 Our borough has inequalities that reach beyond economic disadvantage, covering the protected characteristics of age, gender, pregnancy and maternity, disability, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, as well as other characteristics such as the experience of care, and past or current military service. These factors interact with each other. We know that experiences of poverty, where people live, and other factors intersect to deepen disadvantage and impact on wellbeing and quality of life.
- 2.5 These anti-poverty objectives are informed and underpinned by our values: thinking Stockport, Team work, Ambition and Respect (STAR), which are at the heart of everything we do and describe the way we work in Stockport Council. They influence our choices and our behaviours - they are the thread running through all our work.

3. INTERSECTIONALITY

- 3.1 Our approach to poverty recognises the impact of intersectionality where people who experience more than one protected characteristic or socio-economic risk factor, are at risk of a multiplied disadvantage and are more likely to be in poverty. Our Equality Impact Assessments consider socio-economic status and disadvantaged groups alongside the nine protected characteristics when we make significant decisions. Through their effective use we ensure that the council systematically thinks through the impact of its decisions that our commitment to fairness is translated into practice.
- 3.2 Climate change is a key issue facing all of our communities. The impacts of climate change will affect us all, but we recognise the impact will be different on different people and communities especially those who are the most socially vulnerable including experiencing social and economic deprivation. Climate action can help

² <https://www.jrf.org.uk/deep-poverty-and-destitution/destitution-in-the-uk-2023>

³ <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Full-report-relationship-between-poverty-child-abuse-and-neglect.pdf>

to address issues of fuel and food insecurity, accessibility, a changing economy, air quality, and thereby help reduce inequalities in health and wellbeing.

- 3.3 Our approach to tackling poverty acknowledges the close relationship between financial and digital exclusion. People who cannot afford to get online find it harder to apply for jobs, access training, claim benefits, access information and find the best deals. They are more likely to be in low paid work or claiming out of work benefits. Around 36% of Stockport's working age population lack the digital skills needed for work and 40% of people claiming out of work benefits are struggling to get online.

4. ANTI-POVERTY OBJECTIVES 2024-2027

- 4.1 ANTI-POVERTY OBJECTIVE 1: To ensure a strategic and systematic approach to anti-poverty work is in place which is rooted in the lived experience of people experiencing poverty.

- 4.2 We know that some groups of people experience poorer life chances than others and that poverty can be a significant factor in determining outcomes, opportunities and wellbeing. We are committed to taking a strategic and systematic approach to considering the impact of our decisions and service delivery on poverty. A lack of access to influence and feeling disempowered are important elements of the experience of poverty. The stress this causes is particularly acute in a polarised borough such as Stockport due to the additional impact of social comparison and feeling unable to participate fully in society. We recognise that every person has strengths and abilities and we want to nurture people's potential. We want to develop strong relationships with the people who access our services, in particular those who are excluded or more marginalised. This means listening to challenging ideas and developing relationships of trust.

- 4.3 The action we will take:

- Adopt the socio-economic duty on a voluntary basis⁴
- Ensure our Neighbourhoods and Prevention Programme incorporates our anti-poverty objectives through the delivery of targeted support and interventions.
- Use quantitative data from our services to understand who is not using our services or is over-represented and seek ways to understand why.
- Enhance our Equality Impact Assessment process to consider the impact on socio-economic inequalities of major decisions we make, and pay particular attention when we identify an overlap between poverty and equalities.
- Involve people with experience of poverty in designing and delivering services, and make sure we follow through to action.
- Develop an anti-poverty network as one way of enabling the voice of residents to guide our anti-poverty priorities and support us to deliver effectively.
- Work closely with VCFSE groups which address poverty, and support stronger networking and streamlining rather than duplication of services.
- Roll out a programme of poverty awareness training across our workforce.
- Work closely with our partners across the Borough to deliver these objectives.

⁴ The Socio-Economic Duty is a section of the 2010 Equality Act which has not been formally enacted by Parliament.

4.4 How we will measure success:

- The socio-economic duty in place by 2027 and earlier if possible.
- Evidence of targeted financial and digital inclusion interventions in each of our neighbourhoods as part of the One Neighbourhood Model.
- Services regularly consider socio-economic inequality in designing and delivering their services.
- An increase in the proportion of people living in deprived neighbourhoods who access key services in health, education and employment.
- Our consultation and engagement processes regularly include the lived experience of poverty of our residents.
- An anti-poverty network is vibrant and active and we have examples of how they have made a difference to our services.

4.5 ANTI-POVERTY OBJECTIVE 2: To maximise the income of residents through access to fairly paid, flexible and good quality work.

4.6 We know that some residents are distanced from the labour market because of where they live, their experience, or their caring responsibilities. Work is an important route out of poverty but good work with fair terms and conditions, and sufficient flexibility to support, for example, carers and people with a disability who need reasonable adjustments. The minimum wage is insufficient to prevent poverty: 68% of families in poverty have at least one working adult (DWP 19/20). We want to create opportunities for all residents to reach their full potential in work.

4.7 The action we will take:

- Promote the Good Employment Charter and Real Living Wage to businesses and employers in Stockport, and model best practice ourselves as an employer.
- Promote and provide apprenticeship opportunities for young people at a distance from the labour market.
- Hold inclusive jobs fairs in low-income communities with proactive local outreach and local jobs available.
- Strengthen our public transport infrastructure to enable affordable and accessible access to education, jobs and services.
- Provide benefits advice to those who are moving into work including 'better off' calculations and information about access to work.
- Promote the benefits to employers and businesses of providing flexible work including part time and job share offers.

4.8 How we will measure success:

- 500 more businesses will be signed up to the Good Employment Charter or Real Living Wage, 100 by March 25 in Year 1 of these objectives.
- More apprenticeships are targeted at those who are at a distance from the labour market and are included as part of social value commitments in the Council's procurement contracts.
- The numbers of people attending inclusive job fairs and the numbers who go on to employment or training.
- The numbers of households with no one in work will reduce.

4.9 ANTI-POVERTY OBJECTIVE 3: To maximise the income of residents through provision of high quality easy to access advice including on benefit entitlements.

4.10 Stockport residents do not access their full entitlement to state support which undermines their financial security and increases levels of poverty. For example we estimate over £5-7m per annum goes unclaimed in Pension Credit. The advice service in Stockport was fragmented and hard for residents to navigate and we now have a more coherent and easily accessible Residents' Advice Service (RAS) in place but we know there is more to do to consolidate access to advice.

4.11 The action we will take:

- Build on the Council's RAS to provide easily accessible advice through on line resources and a dedicated phone line with 'warm' handovers to internal and partner advice agencies with face to face advice an available option.
- Run benefit uptake campaigns e.g. on pension credit and attendance allowance.
- Provide residents who are struggling or have a vulnerability with financial advice and support for any services the Council provides which have charges for example social care and council tax.
- Disseminate the financial inclusion offer through services such as Stockport Family and Adult Social Care, and externally through the VCFSE, and ensure referral routes are well understood and utilised including a summary resource.
- Support a programme of work on financial literacy.
- Embed digital inclusion support in our communities so that people can get online to access self-help resources, including online information and advice.

4.12 How we will measure success:

- Numbers of people needing to access advice services, and accessing advice services with more than one issue will reduce.
- Income of residents increased through additional benefits claimed (broken down by one-off back payments and regular ongoing increase to income)
- A process agreed and in place for social workers in Stockport Family and Adult Social Care to refer to the Resident Advice and Support service.
- More residents will be supported to access digital skills, devices and data in order to tackle digital poverty.

4.13 ANTI-POVERTY OBJECTIVE 4: To provide support to residents in a financial crisis.

4.14 Low-income households rarely have savings to fall back on when they hit a crisis such as becoming ill, losing a job, or a cooker breaking. The cost of living crisis has led to increasing levels of food and fuel poverty. We know that bereavement and a new child in the family are significant events which impact on livelihoods and can trigger poverty. More residents than ever are struggling to make ends meet and are hitting a financial crisis. At the same time the Council is facing unprecedented demand on core statutory services and has limited resources to respond. As a result, the level of provision of the following actions will be the best possible but may not fully meet the need in Stockport.

4.15 The action we will take:

- Provide advice on debt and negotiate affordable debt settlement arrangements
- Provide support to residents in a financial crisis through crisis grants, fuel and food vouchers and referrals to food banks
- Review how crisis support is accessed to ensure it is timely and as close to immediate as possible.
- Review our debt recovery policy on the use of enforcement agents and ensure it is in line with national best practice.
- Pilot sustainable models of affordable food provision such as community shops and pantries as an alternative to food banks.
- Disseminate information about our advice service through our registrars service.
- Ensure residents do not need to 'tell their story' repeatedly by designing joined up and person-centred help and advice.

4.16 How we will measure success:

- Amount of debt written off.
- A reduction in the numbers of people needing support with crisis grants, fuel and food vouchers.
- Reduction in numbers of residents presenting to our Residents Advice and Support Service with issues relating to our use of enforcement agents.
- Reduction in the use of food banks (because people are more financially secure).

4.17 ANTI-POVERTY OBJECTIVE 5: To prevent next-generation poverty by working with children, young people and their families.

4.18 A key focus for Stockport Family continues to be addressing the impact of the cost of living crisis on those that experience the greatest disadvantage. The ongoing crisis is continuing to have far reaching implications for families with the borough's most vulnerable children, young people and families feeling this most acutely. We are seeing increased demand for our services reflected in the numbers of children needing to come into our care, and the numbers requiring education, health and care plans.

4.19 The action we will take:

- Maximise the opportunity provided by Family Hubs to prevent child poverty.
- Ensure children are ready for school by delivering our Start Well strategy.
- Deliver the poverty proofing programme widely in our schools and expand the offer to Early Years settings.
- Work with the VCFSE to support the Youth Alliance to be an effective voice for young people which impacts on our plans and services.
- Support attainment of children entitled to free school meals.
- Prevent youth homelessness by supporting families under pressure.
- Work with schools to make school uniforms affordable or establish other support to access uniforms.
- Proactively work with children who are persistently absent post-lockdown.

4.20 How we will measure success:

- The numbers of early help assessments and team around the family plans.
- An increase in the numbers of disadvantaged children achieving the prime areas of learning by the end of reception.
- Increase the numbers of schools which have had a poverty proofing assessment.
- Youth Alliance meets regularly and there are examples of how their input has been considered in strategic decisions.
- Narrow the gap in attainment between children on free school meals and those who are not entitled, at the end of Early Years, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.
- Fewer families apply for support with buying school uniforms.
- Reduce the persistent absence rates to pre-pandemic levels for disadvantaged children.

4.21 ANTI-POVERTY OBJECTIVE 6: To increase the numbers of people in affordable and stable housing and reduce homelessness

4.22 In Stockport the numbers of households seeking accommodation is significantly greater than the supply within the borough, with the result that the private sector is becoming increasingly unaffordable for many households on even average incomes. The cost and availability of housing to either rent or purchase means that those on lower incomes are particularly affected resulting in record numbers of people presenting to the Council as homeless. In 2022/23, Stockport has been forced to use bed and breakfast accommodation to supplement our existing temporary accommodation schemes. The impact on people of being made homeless, and temporary accommodation can be devastating, particularly on their health, well-being and financial stability. We know that access to secure and affordable accommodation is essential for addressing poverty.

4.23 The action we will take:

- Maximise development opportunities.
- Enable access to available options for those most in need.
- Proactively promote the work of the housing standards team to encourage those living in poor quality private rented accommodation to report issues to the Council.
- Work with partners to provide support for people moving into a tenancy (furniture, carpet, white goods etc).
- Promote and support energy efficiency schemes.
- Lobby and influence to bring about change in policy and practice at a subregional and national level.

4.24 How we will measure success:

- Maximising levels of homelessness preventions – seeking to exceed GM performance.
- Increase temporary accommodation options to reduce need to use hotels/B&B
- Stakeholder/partner agency confidence and capacity to deliver basic housing prevention advice and signposting increased.

- Two-year extension to Homelessness Strategy agreed by the Council with tangible and SMART outcomes.
- Audited Personal Housing Plans demonstrate closer alignment of homelessness prevention/relief and accessing employment support and advice.

5. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

We have a legal obligation as a Public Authority to update our Equality Objectives every four years in accordance with The Public Sector Equality Duty. Public authorities are legally required to set at least one equality objective every four years to help focus attention on priority equality issues.

7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

7.1 There are no human resource impacts to consider.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required for this report, but the equality objectives as set out here summarise the Council's approach to equalities and lay out what we intend to achieve. Achieving these objectives will reduce socio-economic inequalities across our Borough. The priorities included in the objectives have been identified through analysing qualitative and quantitative data around equalities.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

9.1 The anti-poverty objectives recognise that impacts of climate change do not fall equally and disproportionately affect people in poverty.

10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 That the Committee approve the Anti-Poverty Objectives to be taken to full Cabinet.

10.2 For further information contact Jilla Burgess-Allen, Director of Public Health: jilla.burgess-allen@stockport.gov.uk.