

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

Report of the Director of Public Health

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report

- sets out the local and national context, policy recommendations and other considerations with regards to adopting the socio-economic duty in Stockport.
- sets out the practical implementation steps.

1.2 This proposal is being presented to Cabinet for approval.

Recommendation(s):

- (1) Cabinet notes the delivery of activity against the Anti-Poverty 2024 – 2027 objectives (see Appendix 1).
- (2) Cabinet adopts the socio-economic duty and approves the implementation stages.
- (3) The council will take socio-economic disadvantage into account in terms of its public sector equality duty.
- (4) The council continues to work with partner organisations across the borough on the development and implementation of the socio-economic duty.

1.3 For more information, contact Tom Plant, Thomas.plant@stockport.gov.uk.

2.0 ANTI-POVERTY APPROACH

2.1 The Fair and Inclusive agenda is a key part of our Council Plan and Neighbourhoods and Prevention programme. Fair and Inclusive is about tackling poverty and inequality and making sure Stockport is a great, diverse place to live where everyone can thrive.

2.2 Poverty causes ill health, drives inequality in health outcomes and increases use of health and care services. In March 2024, Cabinet approved the adoption of the Anti-Poverty Objectives 2024 – 2027. These objectives have a close read across to the recommendations of the GM Independent Inequalities Commission and the Marmot report: Build Back Fairer in Greater Manchester – Health Equity and Dignified Lives. The objectives focus on:

- Maximising income either through work and benefits.
- Minimising outgoings through improving budget management skills, support to write off debt and advice on accessing social tariffs and digital skills and devices.
- Focusing on prevention schemes such as the Poverty Proofing programme in schools which is seen as national best practice.
- Providing support to residents in a crisis.
- Ensuring power and voice for those experiencing poverty.

Power and Voice

2.3 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.

2.4 In order to address poverty, we need to share power with those most affected by poverty and inequality, and that building a fairer and more equal borough means creating processes where everyone can have a stake and a say in the things that affect their daily lives. The council has developed strong community relationships and partnerships with the people who access our services. Our investment in community-based equity networks¹ and our VCFSE strategy have helped with this approach but there is more that needs to be done.

2.5 To further strengthen this area of the Anti-Poverty Objectives, the council will:

- Adopt the socio-economic duty.
- Establish an Anti-Poverty Network of lived experience.

3.0 SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

3.1 The socio-economic duty (SED) aims to ensure that strategic decisions are carefully thought through so that they are effective as possible in tackling socio-economic disadvantage and reducing inequalities of outcome. Such decisions may only be taken annually or, in other cases, they will come up more often. The duty applies to both new strategic decisions and when reviewing previous strategic decisions².

3.2 The overall aim of the SED is to deliver better outcomes for those who experience socio-economic disadvantage. The SED can support this through ensuring that those taking strategic decisions:

- take account of evidence and potential impact through consultation and engagement.
- understand the views and needs of those impacted by the decision, particularly those who suffer socio-economic disadvantage.
- welcome challenge and scrutiny.
- drive a change in the way that decisions are made and the way that decision makers operate.

3.3 Essentially, the SED ensures those in power consider the impact of the decisions on people experiencing poverty.

3.4 Statutory SED does not apply to education settings but it should be noted that the schools that have engaged in poverty proofing will have reflected on similar considerations to those required to implement the SED in their context.

3.5 Despite the Equality Act being passed by the UK Parliament in 2010, successive UK Governments have not implemented the SED. While in April 2018, Scotland brought the duty into force as the Fairer Scotland Duty, and in March 2021, Wales brought it into force under its A More Equal Wales policy agenda. As such, public authorities in England are not bound to consider socio-economic disadvantage when making decisions.

¹ Stockport Women and Girls Network; Stockport Race Equality Network; Stockport LGBTQ+ Network; Stockport Multi-Faith Network; Stockport Disability Network.

² Including medium to long term plans (Corporate Plans, Development Plans, Service Delivery and Improvement Plans); changes to and development of public services; strategic financial planning; major procurement and commissioning decisions; strategic policy development

- 3.6 Research conducted by Resolve Poverty³ (formerly Greater Manchester Poverty Action) highlights:
- 1 in 7 councils have voluntarily adopted the SED with adoption highest in London, the North East and the North West.
 - In Greater Manchester, the SED has been adopted by Wigan, Trafford, Salford and Tameside Councils.
 - More than half of councils are 'acting in the spirit of the duty'.

Stockport Context

- 3.7 In Stockport, Equality Impact Assessments ([EIA](#)) should be done when:
- introducing a new service, policy or scheme (whether or not the service is statutory);
 - proposing to remove all or part of a service, policy or scheme;
 - making a change to the way a service is provided;
 - making any decision that will affect people's life or the quality of it.
- 3.8 In addition to looking at the 9 protected characteristic groups, the EIA guidance encourages the consideration of impact upon other groups that are often disadvantaged or experience discrimination. These are:
- Socio-economic status.
 - Those experiencing homelessness.
 - Veterans.
 - Asylum seekers and refugees.
 - Caring status.
- 3.9 Whilst the socio-economic status is included as a category within EIA this could be strengthened by introducing other proxy indicators to more accurately consider the impact on people vulnerable to socio-economic disadvantage.
- 3.10 A Task Group has been established to review the existing EIA process to:
- Explore opportunities to integrate existing impact assessments into one tool – potential adoption of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Integrated Impact Assessment tool.
 - Embed EIA practice in governance and at the earliest stages of policy making.
 - Ensure that EIAs are used to better inform service design and delivery - responsive to the needs of residents, to deliver better outcomes long-term.
 - Promote a business as usual approach to EDI and inform culture change.
 - Ensuring that impact assessments are live documents throughout the process of decision-making and that are regularly updated.
 - Effective staff training (embedded within induction training), and mentoring, to build skills and knowledge base.
 - Use of data, including the census, is complimentary with lived experience.

4.0 STEPS TO ADOPTING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY IN STOCKPORT

- 4.1 This section outlines the steps to adopting the SED in Stockport and is based on research conducted by a number of organisations including Resolve Poverty, Just Fair and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

³ <https://www.resolvepoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SED-findings-briefing-FINAL-DRAFT-002.pdf>

Principles

4.2 The steps are based on adopting the SED within the following principles:

- Building an evidence base on socio-economic inequality to inform service design and delivery.
- Ensuring socio-economic inequality is laid out at every stage of the policy making process from design to review and feedback.
- Engaging and encouraging services to co-design policies alongside communities with lived experience.
- Keeping the process as simple and streamlined as possible.

Voluntarily adopt the SED by Cabinet

4.3 Approval of this report by cabinet would mean that Stockport Council would, when making decisions:

Actively consider, at an appropriate level, what more can be done to reduce the inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage, in any strategic decision-making or policy development context.

4.4 In practical terms, this would involve the following actions and objectives:

- Formally incorporate socio-economic disadvantage in equality impact assessments, decision-making process and strategies.
- Develop and use a range of relevant data to inform the implementation of the SED and develop clear success criteria.
- Ensure that implementation of the SED has strong and visible commitment from senior leaders.
- Embed the priority to tackle socio-economic disadvantage at all levels of decision-making.
- Engage with people with lived experience of socio-economic disadvantage and find ways to incorporate diverse expertise in policymaking.
- Collaborate with residents and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector to build awareness and understanding of the SED and develop strategies to tackle socio-economic disadvantage together.
- Carry out monitoring and evaluation and introduce mechanisms that can embed accountability for the implementation of the SED.

4.5 Paragraphs 4.6 to 4.30 outline the practical steps to implementation plus intended timescales. These timescales may be subject to change.

Step 1 – Identify Senior Members and Officers to take on the role of “Designated Leads” of the SED

4.6 Strong and visible leadership is vital to facilitating a broader cultural shift that embeds tackling socio-economic disadvantage at all levels of decision-making within the organisation.

4.7 The nominated Lead takes responsibility for communicating why implementation of the SED is a priority. It is crucial that Lead(s) prevent siloing and provide a forum through which different parts of the council can engage with the SED. This will ensure that the commitment to the SED can survive changes in political administration, council leadership, corporate strategy, and national policy agendas.

4.8 Therefore:

- The Designated Leads are the Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Sport alongside the Chair of the Anti-Poverty Steering Group.
- The Anti-Poverty Operations Group and the existing EIA Task Group to act as forum to implement adoption.

4.9 In addition the Council will explore the opportunity to commission an appropriate external organisation to act as critical friend in the adoption and implementation.

Step 2 – Integrate Socio-economic Disadvantage into EIA using appropriate proxy indicators and review processes

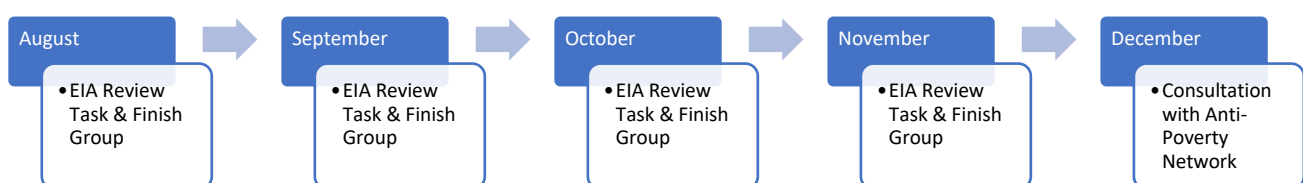
4.10 As stated in paragraph 3.7, at present the Council uses socio-economic status as a category within the EIAs. However, this could be strengthened by introducing a number of other proxy indicators to more accurately consider the impact on people vulnerable to socio-economic disadvantage. These could include, but may not be limited to:

- Single parents and vulnerable families.
- Pensioners.
- Looked after Children.
- Homeless people.
- Students.
- Single adult households.
- People living in the most deprived areas in Stockport.
- People in low paid employment or households of low income.
- People with low literacy and numeracy.
- People who have experienced the asylum system.
- People misusing substances.
- People of all ages leaving a care setting.
- People involved in the criminal justice system.
- People facing multiple deprivation through a combination of circumstances such as poor health or poor housing/homelessness.

4.11 Therefore:

- By the end of September 2024, the EIA Task Group plus input from the Anti-Poverty Steering Group and the Anti-Poverty Operational Group will identify appropriate proxy indicators.

4.12 In order to accurately measure the impact of the project, policy or proposal on socio-economic disadvantage within Stockport, further reassessment of these proxy measures will take place. These reviews will be subject to scrutiny process within the council and consultation with residents (via Anti-Poverty Network).



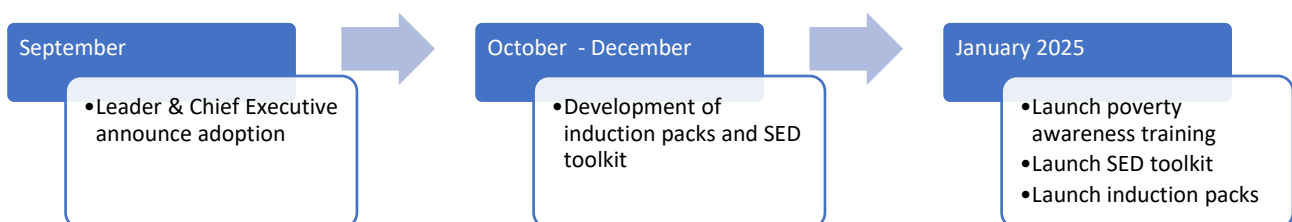
Step 3 – Consolidate existing poverty-related data held by the Council and partners

- 4.13 The use of quantitative data is essential to developing a clear success criteria and measures so that the impact of the socio-economic duty on inequality of outcomes can be collected and monitored.
- 4.14 Given the range of data collected by councils and their partners more could be done to identify residents vulnerable to socio-economic disadvantage by consolidating existing poverty-related data.
- 4.15 Since the SED is not a statutory obligation in England, many of the national-level levers to tackle poverty are not readily available. This makes it especially important to identify what can be measured and monitored locally to evidence progress being made in tackling socio-economic disadvantage and reducing inequalities of outcome.
- 4.16 Therefore we will:
- Continue to use and review existing SITREP and Neighbourhood Profiles.

Step 4 – Develop internal guidance and training for officers to consider how they can meet the SED at a service delivery level, on a day-to-day basis, outside of formal EIAs

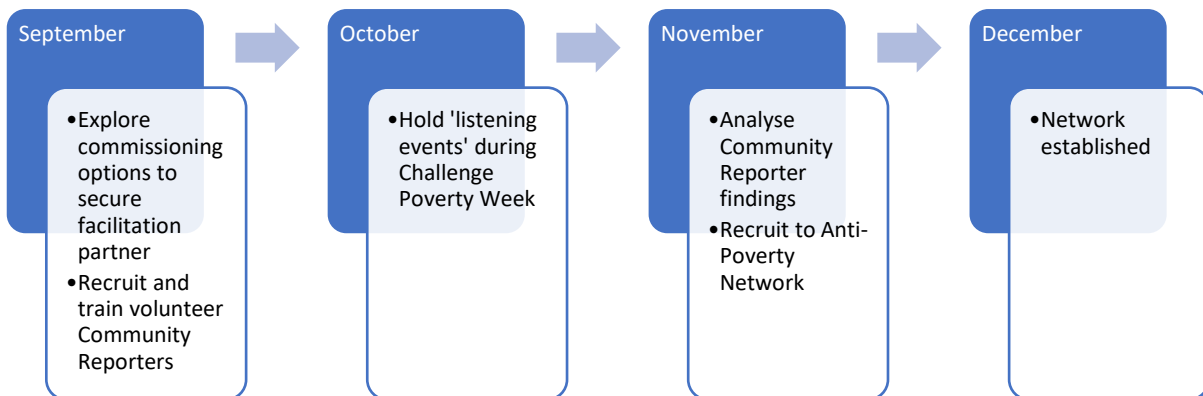
- 4.17 Meeting the SED will require a broader cultural shift within the organisation that will embed the priority of tackling socio-economic disadvantage within individual services on a day-to-day basis. The intention is to foster collective responsibility for the Duty among all staff members and promote greater focus on change to outcomes rather than the decision-making process.
- 4.18 This can be achieved through making principled arguments about why implementing the SED is the right thing to do; and challenging unconscious bias, negative attitudes and stereotypes often aimed at people living in poverty.
- 4.19 Therefore:
- Communicate to and with colleagues via Chief Executive including promotion via intranet.
 - Embed SED into colleague induction and training processes.
 - Deliver poverty awareness training across all Directorates and Members
 - EIA Task Group to develop a SED Toolkit ensuring that individual departments are equipped with bespoke questions to informally assist them in implementing the SED at service delivery level.

4.20 As referenced in 4.22, it is important that the Anti-Poverty Network is involved shaping these proposals.



Step 5 – Collaborate with residents, VCFSE organisations to build awareness and understanding of the SED and people’s lived experience of socio-economic disadvantage

- 4.21 The SED recognises that the best expertise and experience about how to tackle poverty and inequality is often held by those in our communities who live with the reality of socio-economic disadvantage.
- 4.22 Participative consultation and engagement allows officers and residents to find new and sustainable ways to develop strategies to tackle highlighted issues together by combining lived experience, statistical analysis and policy knowledge through collaboration and co-production.
- 4.23 It is essential that this collaboration involves a more in-depth approach than simply gathering as many stories or “case studies” as possible. Instead, meaningful involvement is delivered by understanding the collective experience of those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and ensuring that it is accurately and truthfully represented. This means involving people from the outset, committing to processes rather than one-off events, and exploring how diverse forms of expertise are best incorporated into policymaking.
- 4.24 Therefore we will:
- Deliver series of ‘listening events’ using a Community Reporters approach with a particular focus on the new groups added to the proposed revised EIA.
 - Use ‘listening events’ to recruit to an Anti-Poverty Network.
 - Explore opportunity to commission an appropriate organisation to set up and facilitate the network.



- 4.25 In addition, the Anti-Poverty Network could help with developing a set of personas and case studies which describe how different people living in poverty interact with our services. The personas and case studies would then form a central part of our planned poverty awareness training so that we realise our commitment to ensuring that services are accessible to all and reduce the stigma associated with poverty.
- 4.26 Developing a greater understanding of the priorities within each neighbourhood based on stories of lived experience will also contribute to One Stockport Local Neighbourhoods and Prevention Programme. The information will inform our thinking in terms of the programme’s anti-poverty workstream and is aligned with the programme’s communication and engagement plans.

Step 6 – Embed accountability for the implementation of the SED through monitoring, evaluation, and sharing of best practice.

4.27 The successful implementation of the SED requires:

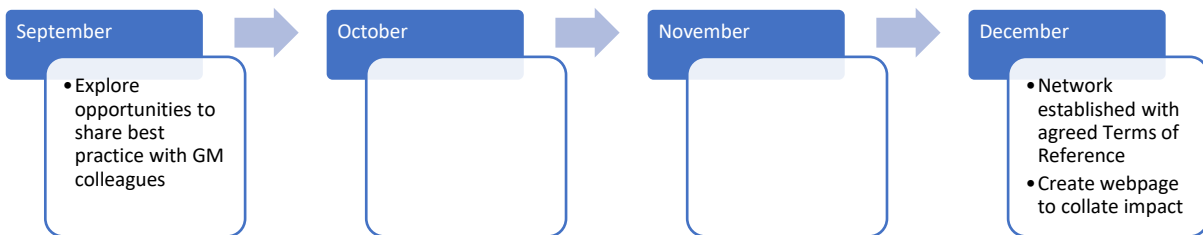
- Robust monitoring and evaluation process.
- Inclusion as a priority in all strategic plans.
- Transparent and accountable consideration of SE disadvantage into annual budget setting and all decision-making processes (including scrutiny arrangements).
- Systematic assessment of impact with appropriate tracking and review.

4.28 The public must also be assured that implementation of the SED has led to meaningful change and is being taken seriously. This could be achieved by an external communications to raise awareness of the SED including plan for implementation and any subsequent assessments as described above publicly viewable.

4.29 Since the SED is not a statutory obligation in England, a new accountability mechanism should also be set up to allow local organisations and residents to challenge decisions that they believe fail to comply with the SED and provide access to justice and redress if this is proven to be the case.

4.30 Therefore we will:

- Collaborate with Greater Manchester (GM) colleagues to share best practice either via GMCA Cost of Living Response Group or Resolve Poverty's GM Local Authority Officer Network
- Create framework for the Anti-Poverty Network to challenge and hold the council to account in its adoption.
- Establish a dedicated webpage to collate impact and successes.



5.0 RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY/CORPORATE PRIORITIES

5.1 The One Stockport Borough Plan⁴ provides the overall strategic framework for the Borough and sets the vision for the future that we want to see. The adoption of the SED contributes to the delivery on the One Heart priorities:

- A caring and growing Stockport.
- A healthy and happy Stockport.
- A strong and supportive Stockport.

5.2 The One Stockport: One Future⁵ sets out the vision for how Stockport can be the best place to live happy and healthy lives, a place where anything is possible, a

⁴ <https://www.onestockport.co.uk/the-stockport-borough-plan/>

⁵ <https://www.onestockport.co.uk/one-future-plan/>

place that everyone, right across the Borough can be proud of. The SED helps to deliver the Anti-Poverty Objectives 2024 – 2027 and therefore contributes to our commitment to:

- Fair and Inclusive: Stockport is a great, diverse place to live, where everyone can thrive.

5.3 The SED also contributes towards two of the '5 big things':

- The best place to grow up:
 - Easy access to top-quality early years support for all 0–5-year-olds, helping to narrow inequalities.
 - Young people involved in shaping the future of Stockport.
 - Having excellent inclusive schools right across the borough which support all children to achieve their potential.
- Thriving neighbourhoods:
 - Joining up public services, working together, alongside local people as a single team.
 - Creating a digitally enabled borough where technology helps people live independently.

5.4 Finally, the SED is a core part of 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 within the Anti-Poverty 2024 – 2027 objectives*⁶:

6.0 RISK AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no risks associated with the adoption of the SED. Moreover, there is a greater risk in failing to address the inequalities of outcome which results from socio-economic disadvantage. Therefore the adoption of the SED is designed to prevent this.

6.2 The role of the Designated Leads is to ensure that the council fully embeds the SED within day-to-day service delivery whilst the role of the Anti-Poverty Network is to hold the Council to account in its adoption.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The vast majority of activity outlined in section 4.0 will require staff time.

7.2 As outlined in the Household Support Fund Phase 5 Executive Decision Record⁷ (EDR), it is proposed to spend £0.020m to support the commissioning of an appropriate organisation to support the council with the SED adoption and establishment of the Anti-Poverty Network.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

8.1 One of the core principles of the Fair and Inclusive programme in Stockport is that we consider intersectionality. This means understanding that disadvantage and discrimination have multiple forms, and that the effects of multiple disadvantage for those who experience more than one form of disadvantage are at least additive. For

⁶ <https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/s230255/Anti%20Poverty%20Objectives%20for%20Cabinet%20March%202024.pdf>

⁷ <https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/s232141/HSF5%20Executive%20Decision%20Record%20Report.pdf>

example, a black disabled person may experience greater disadvantage than a white disabled person with the same disability. The concept of intersectionality also applies to people who experience socio-economic disadvantage alongside the disadvantage linked to a protected characteristic.

8.2 The likelihood of experiencing poverty varies in the population. People who have a disability, women, single people, people who identify as LGBTQ+, people from certain ethnic backgrounds, people who share certain religious beliefs, and people in particular age groups are all more likely to experience poverty than people who don't share that protected characteristic. As such, implementing the SED would be expected, on balance, to substantially contribute to the council's duty to work toward equality for people with a protected characteristic.

8.3 Moreover, it could be argued that implementing the socio-economic duty is necessary in order to achieve the public sector equality duty, since many of the protected characteristics are so entwined with the experience of poverty as to be impossible to fully address without addressing the poverty itself.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Cabinet notes the delivery of activity against the Anti-Poverty 2024 – 2027 objectives (see Appendix 1).

9.2 Cabinet adopts the socio-economic duty and approves the implementation stages.

9.3 The council will take socio-economic disadvantage into account in terms of its public sector equality duty.

9.4 The council continues to work with partner organisations across the borough on the development and implementation of the socio-economic duty.

10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Anyone requiring further information should contact Tom Plant by email on thomas.plant@stockport.gov.uk.

APPENDIX 1 – ANTI-POVERTY UPDATE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides an update on anti-poverty activity since the previous report to Communities and Transport Scrutiny Committee on 20 November 2023⁸. The report is framed by the Anti-Poverty Objectives 2024 – 2027 as approved by Cabinet on 12 March 2024⁹.
- 1.2 This report was presented to Communities and Transport Scrutiny on 2 September 2024¹⁰.

2.0 CONTEXT

- 2.1 The activity described in the following Section 3 has been delivered within the changing national and local context.

National context

- 2.2 The cost of living increased sharply across the UK during 2021 and 2022, affecting the affordability of goods and services bought by households. The annual rate of inflation peaked at 11.1% in October 2022, a 41-year high, before easing over the subsequent 18 months. The House of Commons Cost of Living Research Briefing (July 2024) highlights¹¹:
- In May 2024, inflation fell to 2.0%, the Bank of England's target for the first time since July 2021. Over the three-year period between May 2021 and May 2024, UK consumer prices increased by 20.8% in total.
 - Food prices rose sharply during 2022 and 2023 but these pressures eased during the second half of 2023 and first half of 2024.
 - The Energy Price Guarantee (EPG) introduced in October 2022 capped the typical household energy consumption at £2,500 a year. This limited increases in typical bills to 27% in October 2022. The EPG became less generous in July 2023, increasing to £3,000 a year. However, a fall in the Ofgem price cap in July 2023 meant that the EPG no longer set maximum prices and consumer bills fell. The price cap fell again in October 2023, April 2024 and July 2024. The July to September 2024 price cap will still be almost 30% higher than the winter 2021/22 cap.
- 2.3 Low-income households are disproportionately affected by rising prices due to spending a higher proportion of their income on food and energy. Institute for Fiscal Studies found those least well off were paying 29.1% more for food compared to 23.5% more in better off households. Cheap staples rose in price by 36%, whereas more expensive versions of those same items (milk, pasta, butter) rose by just 16%.
- 2.4 The impact of high inflation on households includes:

⁸ <https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/s226255/Scrutiny%20Anti%20Poverty%20update%20081123.pdf>

⁹ <https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/s230255/Anti%20Poverty%20Objectives%20for%20Cabinet%20March%202024.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/s237736/240902%20Communities%20Scrutiny%20Anti%20Poverty%20update%20v1.0.pdf>

¹¹ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9428/?v=ACEVOCCommunity&v=ACEVOCCommunity>

- Increasing deep poverty for those in large families, families with a disabled person, and lone parent families. Nationally, 46% of adults report an increase in their cost of living compared to the previous month¹².
- Increase in absolute child poverty – a quarter of children are in absolute poverty. This is set to rise further by 2.9 percentage points (or 400,000 children) from 2021-22 to 2023-24. Conversely, absolute poverty among pensioners will fall in 2023-24.
- 14% of people report feeling heavily burdened keeping up with domestic bills and credit repayments at the start of this year¹³.
- Increased demand for crisis food – the Trussell Trust report that between April and September 2023 they provided 1.5m emergency food parcels, equating to a 16% increase from the same period in 2022.
- Increased demand for debt advice – Citizens Advice reported that in February 2024 they helped 46,640 people with debt advice, after a record 48,533 in January 2024.

Stockport context

2.5 The cost of living crisis in the Stockport has had a significant impact:

- In 2022/23, 15.8% of children (9372) are living in absolute low income households, a 26.8% increase compared to 2021/22 (7390). In 2022/23, 20.9% (12,395) were living in relative low income households, a 14.5% increase since 2021/22 (10,828).
- In 2021/22, 8% of children live in a family where the two-child limit of benefits had an impact on their income.
- 26% of households are identified as being financial vulnerable¹⁴ (c.32,928 households)
- 24.4% of households are in receipt of Housing Benefit or Housing Element of Universal Credit (February 2024)¹⁵
- 19,305 households are in receipt of Council Tax Support
- 17% of households are in receipt of Universal Credit (21,446 households)¹⁶
- 5774 people are on Pension Credit¹⁷.
- 8564 (20.7%) children are in receipt of means-tested Free School Meals (FSM)¹⁸

3.0 PROGRESS BY OBJECTIVES

3.1 Section 3 provides an update on key progress and plans for the next 6 months.

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.

3.2 The Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Sport and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources are the joint leads for ensuring the strategic and systematic approach to anti-poverty in Stockport. The Anti-Poverty Steering Group (APSG)

¹² Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey from February and March 2024 shows that 46% of adults in Great Britain reported an increase in their cost of living compared to the previous month.

¹³ Financial Conduct Authority (2024) survey

¹⁴ GMCA analysis of ONS measure of financial vulnerability, Sept 2023

¹⁵ SMBC Neighbourhood Profiles, August 2024

¹⁶ SMBC Neighbourhood Profiles, August 2024

¹⁷ SMBC Neighbourhood Profiles, August 2024

¹⁸ SMBC Neighbourhood Profiles, August 2024

continues to provide strategic coordination for the delivery of the Anti-Poverty Objectives 2024 – 2027.

Action 1.7 – Work closely with VCFSE groups which address poverty, and support stronger networking and streamlining rather than duplication of services.

Action 1.9 – Work closely with our partners across the Borough to deliver these objectives.

3.3 The APSG is supported by the Anti-Poverty Operational Group (APOG) which is responsible for delivering the committed actions with the objectives. Both the APSG and APOG bring together representatives from a range of partner organisations that have a lead responsibility for delivering elements of the objectives.

3.4 The Stockport Community Advice and Information Network (SCAIN) continues to provide a forum for information, advice and networking with partner organisations from the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector. The network meets quarterly to share best practice, service updates and share insight.

Action 1.1 – Adopt the socio-economic duty on a voluntary basis

Action 1.4 – 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.

Action 1.5 – Involve people with experience of poverty in designing and delivering services, and make sure we follow through to action.

Action 1.6 – 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.

Action 1.8 – Roll out a programme of poverty awareness training across our workforce.

3.5 Following the adoption of the Anti-Poverty Objectives 2024 – 2027 in March 2024, significant progress has been made regarding maximising income; minimising outgoings; focusing on prevention schemes; and providing support to residents in a crisis.

3.6 During the next review period, the priority is to focus on ensuring power and voice for those experiencing 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. In order to address poverty, we need to share power with those most affected by poverty and inequality. Building a fairer and more equal borough means creating processes where everyone can have a stake and a say in the things that affect their daily lives. The council has developed strong community relationships and partnerships with the people who access our services. Our investment in community-based equity networks¹⁹ and our VCFSE strategy have helped with this approach but there is more that needs to be done.

¹⁹ Stockport Women and Girls Network; Stockport Race Equality Network; Stockport LGBTQ+ Network; Stockport Multi-Faith Network; Stockport Disability Network.

- 3.7 To further strengthen this area, Appendix 1 sets out the local and national context, policy recommendations and other considerations with a view to:
- Adopting the Socio-Economic Duty (SED).
 - Establishing an Anti-Poverty Network of lived experience.

Action 1.2 – Ensure our Neighbourhoods and Prevention Programme incorporates our anti-poverty objectives through the delivery of targeted support and interventions.

- 3.8 Anti-Poverty is a key workstream within the Connected Communities pillar of the Neighbourhoods and Prevention programme. This programme aims to enable help and support locally building on local relationships and trust to improve accessibility. Over the next review period, the Council will ensure that our Neighbourhoods and Prevention programme fully reflects this through the following actions:
- APOG to complete deep dives for each anti-poverty objective to develop action plans for each neighbourhood footprint.
 - APSG to agree neighbourhood priorities with respect to anti-poverty objectives based on deep dive outcomes.
 - Using neighbourhood priorities to inform development of Neighbourhood Action Plans.

Action 1.3 – Use quantitative data from our services to understand who is not using our services or is over-represented and seek ways to understand why.

- 3.9 A key tool in understanding demand, challenges and keeping track of progress is the Situation Report (SITREP). This document is managed by the Anti-Poverty Operational Group and captures data from across the Resident Advice and Support (RAS) alliance²⁰. The purpose of the SITREP is to provide a collective Stockport view of how the RAS alliance is supporting Stockport residents as well as community insight obtained through our proactive engagement approaches (described in paragraph 3.35). Data has been tracked since March 2023 and headlines highlight:
- On average over 2440 unique residents supported each month; 20% of which live in SK5 (covers Reddish and Brinnington) and 15% from SK6 (covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple, Marple Bridge).
 - Working-age residents (25-69 years) account for 79% of all residents accessing support.
 - Total of 29,885 issues raised.
 - Compared to Q1 2023, data for Q4 2024 shows that the RAS alliance is supporting fewer residents although those who are accessing support are presenting with more issues and are being supported to access more money.
- 3.10 Over the next review period, the Council will continue to use the SITREP and the developing Neighbourhood Profiles to collate quantitative data to understand who is not using our services or is over-represented and seek ways to understand why. The proposed Anti-Poverty Network described in Appendix 1 provides the

²⁰ Resident Advice and Support Alliance includes: i) SMBC Resident Advice and Support (RAS) Team including: Benefit Appeals and Benefits Advice, Debt Advice (includes SLA with Stockport homes for complex debt advice), Crisis Support Funds, Cost of Living Adviceline, outreach support and home visitors and Stopford House Advisors; ii) Citizens Advice Stockport (CAS) commissioned services including Benefits & Tax Credits, Universal Credit, Debt and utilities and communications; iii) Stockport Support Hub (SSH) commissioned prevention and early help service advice provided around finances, foodbank vouchers, Household Support Fund referrals, help with benefit claims/forms/queries, Pension Credit enquiries and Attendance Allowance; iv) Stockport Homes Group (SHG) including benefits & tax credits, benefit appeals, discretionary payments to help with rent, budgeting advice.

opportunity for residents with lived experience to assist with further understanding who is not using our services.

Objective 2: To maximise the income of residents through access to fairly paid, flexible and good quality work

3.11 Significant progress has been made with regards to Objective 2 including:

Action 2.1 – Promote the Good Employment Charter and Real Living Wage to businesses and employers in Stockport, and model best practice ourselves as an employer.

3.12 The council continues to promote the Good Employment Charter (GEC) and the Real Living Wage (RLW) to businesses and employers in Stockport. Promotion has focused on attending and presenting at business networking events; direct engagement with businesses; and supporting businesses with their applications. To date, almost 80 businesses are either Supporters or Members of the GEC and over 80 businesses are RLW accredited. During the next review period the Council will proactively engage employers to increase the number of employers both signed up to the GEC and accredited as RLW employers. This includes hosting a dedicated event for employers, which will take place during Good Employment Week (7th – 11th October).

Action 2.2 - Promote and provide apprenticeship opportunities for young people at a distance from the labour market.

3.13 Young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and /or neurodiverse face particular challenges in the labour market. Therefore a SEND and Neurodiverse Employment Forum has been set up to help with this. The purpose is to support more young people with additional needs into paid employment, and to promote training and resources for schools and colleges and employers so that meaningful paid work is a realistic outcome for all children and young people with SEND and Neurodiverse people in Stockport. The Forum will also develop a strategic approach and action plan aimed at improving employment outcomes. The first meeting took place on 13th June 2024, and the next will take place on the 5 November 2024.

3.14 During the next review period, the council will deliver NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) support, including providing access to Mental Wellbeing support, which will benefit young people at a distance from the labour market. Additionally, the Council will be developing the Construction Hub in the MDC area to include projects to support pre-Apprenticeship opportunities for priority cohorts of young people, such as Care Leavers.

3.15 In coordination with the Care Leavers Covenant group, the Council's Social Value Team identify social value opportunities to create work and skills opportunities for people who are long-term unemployed, Care Leavers and young people who are NEET. These opportunities include apprenticeships and work placements/experience; as well as employability workshops; and skills development i.e. CV writing, interview techniques, confidence building; and mentoring. One example is the Christie Hospital who have provided several care leavers with work experience in the catering department, whilst offering courses (hygiene, Health and safety) to complete while they are there to add to their C.V.

- 3.16 The **Pure College Supported Internship** launched in September 2023 to support young people with SEND and/or EHCP (Education Health and Care Plan). 6 students undertook a variety of placements throughout the academic year. Following positive placements, 4 individuals have gone on to gain paid employment within related employers and two have been offered Apprenticeships. From September 2024, 11 new interns will be supported to access up to 3 placements each over the academic year. A mix of Council and external placements are currently being sought according to interests and ability.
- 3.17 **Jumpstart** is a scheme that works with young care leavers 18-25 who may be at risk of long-term unemployment, and getting them closer to employment, education or training with a fully tailored, supported programme that meets their individual needs and aspirations. The scheme enables young people furthest from the labour market to try roles in a less formal way, at their pace and with teams matched to their interests and requirements. Young people are referred into the scheme by the Council's Leaving Care Team, Pure Insight or the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP). Some highlights: following successful placements, three young people have been offered Apprenticeships and one individual supported to gain paid employment. The schemes won the award for the Best inclusion and Diversity initiative at the PPMA (People Managers Association) awards in April 2024²¹.

Action 2.3 – Hold Inclusive Jobs Fairs in low-income communities with proactive local outreach and local jobs available.

- 3.18 Following the successful delivery of Inclusive Jobs Fairs in Brinnington (January 2023) and Offerton (October 2023) a third Inclusive Jobs Fair was held at All Hallows Church in Cheadle in April 2024.
- 3.19 Over 230 residents attended the event – more than the total combined attendance for the previous two fairs. Additionally, the event attracted a diverse group of people with 22% of attendees identifying themselves as being of Asian heritage and 37% identifying themselves as being neurodivergent, having a disability, having a mental health condition, and/or having a long-term illness. Highlight outcomes include:
- 5 people gained employment.
 - Individual services reported receiving 30-40 referrals for follow-up support, access to training, and job applications.
 - Cheadle Parish are now working in partnership with the Growth Company to provide volunteering opportunities for clients in their community café.

Quote

"Never been before, and I really thought wow, tears in my eyes, there is really help out there."

"I knew a while back I had to do something to kick start me confidence wise and this was it. A positive start. We found what we were looking for straight away and are walking away happy."

"I would never have applied for a job if it wasn't for all the kindness and support that [council staff] gave to me. Cannot thank you enough for all your help. I was

²¹ <https://www.ppma.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Winners-Brochure-final-2024-3.pdf>

so nervous as lost confidence and [the] support was truly amazing and helpful. I found what I was looking for, thank you. All the staff are amazing, kind and so helpful."

"Found some helpful people who seem like they sincerely care about helping me escape from my current situation."

- 3.20 The next Inclusive Jobs Fair will be held at All Saints Church, Heaton Norris 15th October 2024. To further support residents living in Lancashire Hill, the council and partners are setting up a weekly 'job club' where residents can get information and support with regards to getting job-ready. Lancashire Hill Job Club starting Thursday 5 Sept 2024. Ingeus²² will lead the job club and will be supported by the Council's Continuing Education Team and DWP Supporting Families Advisors. Support available will include: help with C.V. writing, referrals to SmartWorks, help with job applications, access to training, and provide a space for agencies and employers to meet with residents. The first session will take place on 5 September 2024.

Action 2.7 – Improve access to and the take-up of good-quality affordable childcare so that it is not a barrier to employment, particularly for women.

- 3.21 The take up of early education and childcare remains high in Stockport. In 2024, 99% of 3–4-year-olds were benefitting from attending an early education place, higher than the national average take up (95%). The number of vulnerable two-year-olds benefitting from funded early education continues to be very high at 91% of those eligible, higher than the national average (75%). In addition, 98% of these two-year-olds are in early years provision that is rated good/outstanding by Ofsted. This means that children in Stockport are accessing high quality early education and childcare which support their journey to school readiness and in addition it enables their parents to return to work or access training if appropriate.
- 3.22 The increase in funded early education for children of working parents aged two years from April 2024 will mean that more parents can get help with their childcare costs. This will be extended to children from nine months from September 2024. Additional support towards childcare costs is also available for parents on Universal Credit or through Working Tax Credit scheme to enable more working parents of young children to return to/remain in or start work after maternity and paternity leave whilst children are benefitting from high quality early education.
- 3.23 Over the next review period, priorities for Objective 2 include:
- Develop an In-Work Progression offer in Stockport (funded from GMCA), to support residents in low paid/insecure employment to either progress into better paid, more secure and skilled employment with their current employer, or to move into alternative employment.
 - Develop WorkWell Local Delivery (as part of a GM Programme funded by DWP) to support people at risk of falling out of employment due to a health condition, or recently unemployed with a health condition – joint Work, Skills and Health approach.
 - Develop a Work & Skills Triage as a 'single point of contact' for ease of accessing employment and skills support in Stockport (in-person, online and

²² <https://ingeus.co.uk/>

phone contacts) – with onward supported handover to the appropriate support such as In-Work progression and WorkWell.

- Stockport Work and Skills Plan to be published setting out key actions to improving access to skilled employment opportunities.
- Work & Skills Agreements developed for key new projects such as Stockport 8 and Stockport Exchange Phase 5.
- Delivery of a series of VCSE based GM Community Grants funded Projects for Work & Skills support in Stockport, with network support between them for joint working / referrals.
- Support the development of Universal Support design to ensure strong linkage with local Advice & Wellbeing Services ahead of starting later next year.
- Strengthen our public transport infrastructure to enable affordable and accessible access to education, jobs and services as part of the Economic Plan priorities.

Objective 3: To maximise the income of residents through provision of high quality easy to access advice including on benefit entitlements

3.24 Significant progress has been made with regards to Objective 3 including:

Action 3.1: Build on the Council’s RAS to provide easily accessible advice through online resources and a dedicated phone line with ‘warm’ handovers to internal and partner advice agencies with face-to-face advice an available option.

3.25 The dedicated **Cost of Living advice line**²³ launched in April 2023. The RAS team can help residents access advice on many issues including Council Tax, welfare rights, benefits, housing, school uniforms, family support vouchers and budgeting support, plus urgent support in a crisis situation. The line is open Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm. Since April 2023, over 5000 residents have accessed the service with over 6500 issues. The most frequent reasons why residents called the line related to crisis support relating to food (25.6%), energy (15.8%) and inability to pay Council Tax bills (8.9%).

3.26 Since April 2023, over 2800 **warm referrals** have been made to internal and partner advice agencies. Of these, 29% have been to food banks and 16% for help with accessing discretionary awards. This further highlight that residents are contacting the line in crisis as outlined in paragraph 3.25.

3.27 The Cost of Living Team are directly supported by the Specialist Welfare Rights & Debt Advice Team, who support with complex calls and take on casework for residents struggling with multiple debt and/or benefit appeal issues. The Welfare Rights Support Officers assist vulnerable and housebound residents with benefit checks and help to claim.

3.28 The Council’s **Cost of Living webpage**²⁴ provides a hub of information relating to cost of living support. Since April 2023, the page has received 20,539 visits. Over the next review period, the webpage will be reviewed to ensure it is up to date with the latest support available as well as focusing on ensuring the page is easy to read.

²³ <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/cost-of-living-advice-line>

²⁴ <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/topic/cost-of-living-support>

Action 3.2 – Run benefit uptake campaigns e.g. on Pension Credit and Attendance Allowance

- 3.29 Policy in Practice²⁵ estimates that the total amount of unclaimed income-related benefits and social tariffs²⁶ across Great Britain has increased to £22.7 billion a year due to lack of awareness; administrative complexity and increasing fragmentation of support; and stigma. Within this context, action 3.2 focuses on activity to increase uptake of benefits.
- 3.30 The Council's **Welfare Rights and Debt Advice Team** (within the RAS Team) provide help to residents to maximise income by accessing grants, unclaimed benefits and appealing benefit decisions. During 2023/24, 2508 unique residents accessed the service. In total, during the same period, the team have supported residents to access £4.449m in cash gains. This is new income that residents received from new benefits awards and represents new money coming into the Stockport economy.

Case Study – successful benefit appeal

"Me and mum have been crying our eyes out. It's been such a long time of fighting for X. We couldn't have done it without you. Thank you so much for your support and help in managing X's appeal, we are both beyond happy for her."

"Thank you so much for all your help. I was feeling overwhelmed, but now I see there are ways to improve our situation. Your support has given me hope for a better future for my family."

Case Study – Stockport Homes

Background

Resident A has physical and mental disabilities. He lives independently in a Stockport Homes property. His sister is his legal guardian and appointee, though she lives a very long way from Stockport and has health issues of her own. A was in receipt of Personal Independence Payment and the enhanced rate for both mobility and daily living but was struggling financially. Stockport Homes managed to establish that Mr A had been in receipt of contributory Employment and Support Allowance for many years but should have been entitled to an income-related top-up. He'd missed out on this for years.

Result

After 20 months of wrangling with Employment and Support Allowance, Resident A was eventually awarded a backdated payment of approx. £20,000 as well as increased income each week.

²⁵ <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/missing-out-2024/>

²⁶ i) DWP/HMRC benefits including Universal Credit, Pension Credit, Carer's Allowance, Child Benefit; ii) Locally Administered Benefits including Council Tax Support, Housing Benefit for Pensioners, Free School Meals and Healthy Start; iii) Social tariffs and energy support including water, broadband, Warm Homes Discount and TV Licences.

- 3.31 In addition to universal support to access unclaimed benefits across the RAS alliance, specific campaigns have focused on:
- 3.32 A partnership between the Council and Heaton Moor Medical Group (HMMG) commenced in November 2023 to increase the uptake of **Attendance Allowance**. HMMG wrote to patients whose medical records showed conditions which were likely to make them eligible for Attendance Allowance and invited them to contact the council's RAS Team if they were not already in receipt of the benefit and wished to explore the possibility of making an application. The support offered by RAS included advice and assistance with completion of the application form, including the offer of a home visit if requested and checks on any further benefits that may be claimable, such as **Pension Credit** and **Housing Benefit**. The results of the pilot are preliminary, due to the time lag between application and outcome. As of 7 August 2024, 65 residents had requested home visit assistance from the Council's Welfare Rights team, and of those for whom an application had been made eight cases had been finalised with cash gains of £44,237.62, with almost £41,000 of this representing annualised income, had been confirmed. There are currently 57 open cases being progressed.
- 3.33 The Council and partner organisations continue to promote **Healthy Start Vouchers**²⁷ to increase the number of eligible people applying for the scheme. To increase awareness and uptake, the following has taken place: regular briefings for staff including Start Well Development Day, TAP meetings, PVI Early Years Settings Network; regular posts on Start Well social media and Council communication channels; Healthy Start promoted at Money Maximising Roadshow events; printed application leaflets given out with every birth registration at Stockport Registry Office; information shared digitally with parents via Essential Parent; and GM Training video shared with DWP, who are sending reminders to all relevant people on Universal Credit and work coaches have added HS to their checklists. As of July 2024, 1395 parents are in receipt of the vouchers²⁸. In Stockport, around a third of those eligible are not in receipt of Healthy Start (similar to the national average). Over the next review period, plans include:
- Work in partnership with Stockport Homes to explore installing card readers at Your Local Pantries to be able to accept Healthy Start as payment.
 - Target promotion with Stockport Food Network to ensure information on Healthy Start is shared.
 - Explore the widening of Healthy Start vitamin availability to Family Hub venues not already supplying.
 - Continue to promote Healthy Start through all channels mentioned above.
 - Work with our trusted partners in the community to see if language is a barrier for parents to access Healthy Start.
 - Continue to support GMCA and national campaigns for autoenrollment, increase in the amount per week, increase the CAP set and changing the eligibility age to 5, to match the start of FSM provision.

²⁷ NHS help to buy healthy food and milk plus free vitamins for pregnant women and families with a child under 4 years on a low income.

²⁸ The NHS has identified an issue with the source data used to calculate uptake of the Healthy Start scheme since January 2023. Therefore the NHS have removed previously available figures for eligibility and uptake and have from January 2024 have changed the naming of 'entitled beneficiaries' to 'people on the digital scheme'.

- More awareness raising needed to get children on Universal FSM enrolled to Income based FSM as soon as they are eligible.

3.34 As of June 2024, 9124 children are in receipt of **means-tested Free School Meals (FSM)** in Stockport²⁹. This is a 17.4% increase since April 2021 (7768). The FSM allocation is paid directly to schools to cover the cost of a school meal and is estimated to benefit the recipient family by £502 per child per year in school meals. FSM is only awarded upon application therefore potential eligible families are missing out on support. There has been a significant increase in the number of schools now using the Online FSM portal³⁰ to check eligibility on behalf of parents. Whilst the number of potentially eligible pupils that are not in receipt of FSM is unknown locally, research by Policy in Practice estimates that circa 471,000 children miss out nationally. During the next review period, the Council will continue to work with partners to encourage the uptake of FSM which may include exploring auto-enrolment options. DWP are including reminders to all UC clients and work coaches have added FSM to their checklist.

3.35 The Council continues to coordinate income maximisation activities through the **Spend Well Live Well** campaign based on data from the RAS SITREP, Team Around the Place (TAP) groups and local intelligence. Since December 2023, highlights include:

- Continue to broker the attendance of services³¹ at community-led sessions based on the needs of clients. Most recently DWP Family Outreach Advisors are now based at Brinnington and Adswood Family Hubs once a week to work with colleagues supporting families. Furthermore, a partnership has been created between Money Matters (see paragraph 3.37) alongside DWP Supporting Families and the Council's Debt and Welfare Rights Team to work together and built on each other's strengths.
- Monthly financial inclusion specific session alongside a community café in Heaton Norris, Lancashire Hill and Edgeley.
- Attendance at a variety of community-led events to promote financial support including: Stockport Homes Customer Roadshows; community-led fun days in Reddish, Heaton Norris, Edgeley and Webb Lane allotments; supporting a new Public Health-led engagement project in Adswood and Bridgehall and Ratcliffe Tower, Mottram Street.

Case Study – Community event

Background

Resident attended a community activity where officers were promoting financial support. Conversation with resident revealed that her son sleeps on the settee due to not having enough money to afford a bed.

Action

Officer completed a referral to Chelwood Food Bank to access the bed project

Result

²⁹ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

³⁰ <https://apply.cloudforedu.org.uk/ofsm/sims>

³¹ Including DWP Supporting Families Advisors, Citizens Advice, Groundwork Energyworks and Starting Point.

Chelwood carried an assessment of need and provided the resident with a bed, mattress and bedding. Additionally, Chelwood provided the family a food pack plus a Christmas hamper.

Mum said: *“He didn't want to get up this morning, he was too comfy. thank you for helping to make such a difference in his life, he is so happy.”*

- 3.36 During the next review period, the Council will ensure that events and activities are aligned to national campaigns including Challenge Poverty Week and Talk Money Week as well as supporting our digital colleagues with a digital device amnesty .
- 3.37 Since February 2024 Resolve Poverty (previously Greater Manchester Poverty Action) have been running a **Money Matters** project in Stockport schools³², supporting parents to maximise their incomes. Between Feb 24 and May 24, £28k was achieved in income maximisation, and a further £22k has been applied for and awaiting confirmation. This scheme will continue until September 2024.

Action 3.3 – 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.

- 3.38 Set up in October 2022, the Supporting Household Pilot was established to provide a more supportive approach to helping households with outstanding care services debt. Residents are selected to receive a call by the RAS Team. Since March 2023, the RAS Team have agreed over £1.384m worth of commitments to pay, with over £0.754m of actual monies received (which would not have been achieved without this intervention). By communicating with residents, their families and/or advocates this has assisted the Council in understanding why payments were outstanding, working with the resident to tackle the root cause and support their financial hardship. The scheme directly supported residents by helping them to maximise their income and to explore alternative discretionary support schemes that they may be entitled, which in turn helps make social care charges more affordable.
- 3.39 The Council's Council Tax service has established a specialist proactive collection team which contacts residents that have fallen behind with their payments before formal recovery action commences. This allows the team to understand the resident's situation and tailor an approach, which ranges from agreeing realistic and affordable repayment arrangements, help with applications for Council Tax Support and discretionary assistance, along with referrals to the RAS team and Citizens Advice Stockport for further debt, personal budgeting and income maximisation advice. This helps avoid further costs being added to their account and reduces the potential for debt to be referred to an Enforcement Agent.

Quote

“Firstly, her manner, approach, politeness and knowledge has helped to put my mind at ease with a situation regarding my council tax. Firstly she advised that I could set up a payment plan which would help me out financially: secondly, I rang this amazing lady back to explain I had received a letter, which I thought told me

³² St Pauls Primary, Brinnington; St Mary's Primary, Heaton Norris; Dial Park Primary, Offerton; Bridgehall Primary, Bridgehall; Vale View Primary, Reddish; Bramhall High and Stockport Academy

I didn't have to pay anything. I told her I was going to get in touch with the CAB and she gave me all the required benefit numbers and email addresses to give to them. This is something I would never of thought about if it hadn't of been for this star employee. Thirdly, I had a query regarding a letter to do with tax codes which I had posted. I knew it wasn't her job of expertise but asked her a couple of questions regarding this anyway in the hope she could shed some light on it. Well, not only did she shed light, she advised me without hesitation and then some".

Action 3.4 – 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.

3.40 In 2022, the Council developed the **Stockport Money Advice & Referral Tool (SMART)**. This document is aimed at frontline colleagues and volunteers to have better conversations with residents and to identify the root cause of the presenting issue and identify the most appropriate support organisation.

3.41 To build on the positive and successful impact of the SMART, the Council re-launched the SCAIN meetings in August 2022, inviting services from within the Council and partner agencies across the VCFSE sector to share information and updates on trends and new services, along with raising awareness of changes in government policy which could impact Stockport residents. An example of this would be the migration of legacy benefit claimants to Universal Credit, which is happening now. From the SCAIN membership, working groups have been established to tackle specific issues which may impact.

Case Study – SCAIN Working Group on Universal Credit migration

Background

Working group comprising representatives from RAS, Revenues and Benefits, Stockport Homes, Support Hub, Age UK Stockport, Disability Stockport and Job Centre Plus established June 2024.

Action

To discuss, raise awareness and mitigate of the impact of UC migration on vulnerable residents by sharing information and updates

Outcome

Ongoing discussions but already mitigations are being put in place to enable Stockport resident to receive support when needed, and escalation routes put in place. This should ensure that vulnerable people (particularly those with serious mental health conditions do not lose income and fall into poverty.

3.42 Over the next review period, the Council will:

- Work with partners to further iterate the SMART tool to ensure that it reflects the latest support offer as well as providing support to specific directorates to raise awareness of support available.
- Include support available as part of the proposed poverty awareness training described in Appendix 1.

Action 3.6 – Embed digital inclusion support in our communities so that people can get online to access self-help resources, including online information and advice.

- 3.43 The aim of our approach is to ensure that more residents will be supported to access digital skills, devices and data in order to tackle digital poverty. Alongside our Digital Alliance partners, the council is committed to ensuring that all residents will be able to ‘get online’ everyday in Stockport. This is being achieved through:
- **Access to devices and data** – all 16 libraries have public computers available free of use. Stockport Community Computers, provide refurbished computers to Stockport residents on a low income as an alternative to high-rate lenders. Computers cost under £60³³ and come with a 12month licence for Microsoft Office™. Anything to add about Digital Lending Library? 50 devices³⁴ have been provided to various organisations and schools across the borough, for those most affected/at risk of device or data poverty. There are 21 databanks available in Stockport.
 - **Digital skills training** – 6 of the libraries have ‘DigiKnow digital champions’ who offer weekly support. The Council’s DigiKnow delivery partner Starting Point deliver weekly sessions across Stockport including libraries, York Street Community Centre in Edgeley and Cornerstone. Additional digital support sessions are provided three times per week delivered by Sky-Up champions at Age UK/Sky community digital hub in Edgeley.
 - **Digital skills training to organisations** – Delivery of Digital Friends training delivered to Council colleagues (Libraries and Adult Social Care) and GPs.
- 3.44 Weekly digital support sessions are also provided in 4 GP surgeries (Heaton Moor, Cheadle, Bramhall & Marple) aimed at increasing usage and knowledge of ‘NHS app’. Sessions are delivered by volunteer ‘DigiKnow champions’ or by NHS staff and delivered in either in the libraries nearest to specific surgery or within the surgery itself.
- 3.45 Since April 2024, the Council has worked with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) on a ‘Digital Mapping’ initiative. This aims to ensure that Stockport residents are no more than 15mins away ‘on foot’ from local/public ‘online’ centres & venues. Additionally, the initiative ensures that approaches can be more focussed on excluded neighbourhoods in Stockport where digital poverty is most heightened. Plans for next review period:
- Further embed digital inclusion within the Council’s financial information, advice and guidance approaches.
 - Increase the delivery of patient access in more surgeries across the borough.
 - Provide financial inclusion training to Digital Champions
 - Further work with VCFSE partner organisations to building capacity around digital, anti-poverty and wellbeing skills.
 - Work in partnership with Housing Associations and carers to preventing digital exclusion as a result of the digital switchover.
 - Aim for all TAP Captains to be trained as Digital Friends and ensure that weekly digital inclusion support is available in every Team Around the Place area

³³ <https://shop.communitycomputers.co.uk/>

³⁴ Devices donated by Deloitte

- Deliver targeted digital inclusion sessions i.e. communities of identity (particularly in partnership with Stockport Race Equality Partnership) and care homes.

Objective 4: To provide support to residents in a financial crisis

3.46 Significant progress has been made with regards to Objective 4 including:

Action 4.1 – Provide advice on debt and negotiate affordable debt settlement arrangements

- 3.47 Support for residents with debt is available via the Council’s Debt Advice Team (within the Resident Advice and Support service). Support includes free specialist, impartial and confidential advice; case work; and representation in County Court at eviction and possession hearings, among others. The team help with complex debt issues including: Council Tax and other local authority and government debts, rent and mortgage arrears, energy and water debts, complex single and multiple debts, bailiffs and enforcement. Debt solutions include bankruptcy, Administration Orders and Debt Relief Orders.
- 3.48 The debt advice team work closely with Welfare Rights colleagues to ensure Stockport residents’ income are maximised, and with other Council departments to assist vulnerable residents with Council debt. They team also provide dedicated debt advice service to Stockport Homes residents.
- 3.49 For 2023/24, 1,291 unique residents were supported by the Council’s Debt Advice Team. Since March 2023, the running total for debt written off is £1.678m. Collectively across the RAS Alliance, since March 2023, the total amount of debt written off is £2.406m.
- 3.50 During the next review period, the council and partnership will continue to work together to ensure that those in need of support are proactively engaged to receive appropriate help with their debts.

<p>Case Study – debt advice</p> <p>Background A disabled resident with a disabled child was facing eviction from their home due to mortgage arrears.</p> <p>Action Debt adviser represented in court to get the eviction suspended twice which bought valuable time. This enabled Welfare Rights to help with a PIP appeal.</p> <p>Outcome The appeal was successful and resulted in an award of an additional £101 per week with a backdate of £4500. The debt adviser helped the resident to make an offer to the mortgage company which was accepted, and they are now safe in their home. Had they been evicted the Council would have been under an obligation to provide housing at some considerable expense.</p>
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Case Study – Debt Advice

Background

A Debt Adviser was helping a vulnerable lady with mental health issues, with 5 debts totalling £7k. The resident asked for help because the creditor was pursuing debts which were many years old.

What we did

The Debt team, challenged that the debts were subject to Section 5 Limitation Act 1980 on the basis they were too old to recover through court action, and in accordance with FCA rules, the resident should not be contacted again on this matter.

What happened

Creditor confirmed that the accounts "are now closed, as they had become subject to Section (5) of the Limitation Act 1980. This means we won't be sending our customer any further correspondence in relation to the matter and we have cleared the outstanding balances".

The resident said "You are amazing! Thank you so so much, I know I have been a pain in these very busy times, but you have always looked after me, I cannot put in words how much I appreciate your help every time, honestly I don't know how I would get through this without you, thank you again, your like an angel".

Action: 4.2 – Provide support to residents in a financial crisis through crisis grants, fuel and food vouchers and referrals to food banks

Action 4.3 – Review how crisis support is accessed to ensure it is timely and as close to immediate as possible.

Support Funds

- 3.51 This was a dedicated service to help residents in need of crisis support. All applications for crisis support had to meet eligibility criteria which demonstrates financial hardship, and the funds are awarded to help with food, energy, daily essentials and rent. There are two types of discretionary payments administered by the team; for rent (Discretionary Housing Payments), and daily essentials (Discretionary Awards). The team also assists residents with applications for discretionary Council Tax Support. During 2023/24, 8778 applications were received. 25.6% of applications were from residents living in Brinnington and Central, 8.6% from Davenport and Cale Green and 8.4% from Reddish North. 3270 awards made (2551 Discretionary Awards and 719 Discretionary Housing Payments), equating to £0.130m.
- 3.52 From 1 April 2024, the Support Funds team have merged with the Cost of Living Adviceline to become Crisis Support and Income Maximisation (part of Resident Advice Service). This ensures that residents can access crisis support in a more

timely manner (no online application required) and ensures that the council maximises the role of Trusted Partners in providing discretionary support. Since 1 April 2024, 146 crisis awards have been made, totalling £7976 and 39 Discretionary Housing Payments have been made, totalling £33,868.49

- 3.53 Stockport Homes Money Advice Team continue to support customers to maximise their income and claim any unclaimed benefits. These figures are included in the RAS alliance data captured in the SITREP (see paragraph 3.9). In addition, Stockport Homes use a dedicated **Hardship Fund** to provide targeted support to households that are struggling with their increased rent and service charges. Since April 2023, over £40,000 has been awarded to households.

Household Support Fund

- 3.54 The Household Support Fund Phase 4 (HSF4) which covers the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 was successfully delivered with an estimated 30,000 households supported. Highlights include:

- Crisis Support – £0.100m allocated to the council's Support Funds and the Out of Hours Social Care Team to provide emergency discretionary support. Combined, over 1000 households received emergency crisis support.
- Centrally Administered Vouchers – £2.723m awarded in Family Support Vouchers. Worth £195 per child, vouchers were distributed across two rounds (July and December, both worth £97.50). The first voucher was redeemed by 7887 families (13,927 children) whilst the second voucher was redeemed by 8286 families (14,179 children).
- Trusted Partners – £0.666m allocated to a network of Trusted Partners³⁵ to target discretionary support at specific vulnerable cohorts including pensioners, those with a disability, unpaid carers, those living in and leaving temporary accommodation, and those experiencing mental health issues and those living in or fleeing domestic abuse. Over 3000 households have benefited from this approach, of which 48% has supported a household with a disabled person. The approach has been recognised regionally and nationally as best practice by the GM Disabled Peoples Panel and the Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPO) England Forum.
- Direct Grants – £0.092m allocated to the council's Care Leavers Team and Fostering Service to provide discretionary support to care leavers and households with Special Guardianship Orders (SGO). In total 150 care leavers and 162 SGO families received support.
- VCFSE Investment –
 - £0.175m allocated to expand the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme to deliver food and activities at May, October and February half terms plus food hampers at Christmas. 4962 places were delivered by 18 providers over the three half terms, benefiting an estimated 2918 families.
 - £0.090m allocated to a network of food banks and pantries benefiting an estimated 5000 households were supported by these organisations.
 - £0.234m awarded to VCFSE organisations via three Stockport Local Fund (SLF) Spend Well Live Well (SWLW) grants launched in June and December 2023. This included: £0.141m awarded to organisations to

³⁵ Disability Stockport, Age UK Stockport, Signpost for Carers, OWLS – Ongoing Women's Local Support, SMBC RAS Team, Stockport Support Hub and Stockport Homes

- deliver 49 projects that supported residents with cost of living via community activities which benefited an estimated 2319 households.
- 83 organisations received a share of £0.093m to deliver 96 warm spaces. It is estimated these warm space activities benefited 3721 households.
- Administration – £0.303m spent on administration including £0.140m spent on providing advice services.

Case Study – Household Support Fund

Age UK Stockport used the HSF to support an older household that had no heating for 8 years, no hot water for 2 years and no savings.

On the day of referral via Social Care, Age UK Stockport provided emergency heaters, a warm pack and food voucher as well as booking a gas engineer to complete work. Within less than one week, a new boiler and radiators were installed (circa £2k worth of support) and *“the family are in tears and can’t believe that they were able to get support”*.

In addition, Age UK Stockport are supporting the household to apply for Attendance Allowance. Due to the complexity of their circumstances, the household had difficulty accessing support. While a Social Worker is in place, the HSF enabled the provision of immediate and essential improvements to their situation.

Household Support Fund + Positive Investment programme

- 3.55 Following the announcement of the Household Support Fund 5 (HSF5) extension at the Spring Budget Statement, in April 2024, Cabinet approved the HSF5 Delivery Plan³⁶ for the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024³⁷. The Delivery Plan includes the distribution of the £2.163m HSF plus the delivery of £0.500m of council one-off resource. Whilst the HSF5 grant is to be spent by the end of September 2024, the one-off resource (Positive Investments Fund) must be spent by the end of March 2025. A summary of progress includes:

Family Support Vouchers

- 3.56 In July 2023, £1.643m was awarded in Family Support Vouchers to 15,648 children. Vouchers are worth £105 per eligible child³⁸. As of 20 August 2024, 90% of these vouchers have been redeemed. In a change to the HSF4 vouchers, these vouchers are designed to support households with household essentials including food, energy, school uniforms.

Trusted Partners

- 3.57 The council is again working with a network of Trusted Partners to provide discretionary support to target cohorts including households with a pensioner, unpaid carers and disabled people³⁹. For HSF5, Trusted Partners have been

³⁶ <https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/s232141/HSF5%20Executive%20Decision%20Record%20Report.pdf>

³⁷ <https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=6859>

³⁸ Eligible children include families that have dependent children and receive local Council Tax Support and/or Housing Benefit paid by Stockport Council; or school-aged children who receive income-based Free School Meals in a Stockport school, or those in Early Years with equivalent eligibility

³⁹ Trusted Partners includes Age UK Stockport, Disability Stockport, Signpost for Carers, Stockport Support Hub, OLWS – Ongoing Local Women’s Support

expanded to include support for additional target cohorts including ethnic minority communities, SEND families and out of work households. Trusted Partners have an allocation of £0.254m to distribute by the end of September plus an additional £0.293m to allocate by the end of March 2025. As of 13 August 2024, 370 items of support have been provided to 270 households.

VCFSE Investments

- 3.58 In 2023/24, the Trussell Trust distributed 25,063 food parcels in Stockport, a 74% increase compared to 2019/20 (14,413)⁴⁰. To support the borough's foodbanks with this increased demand, £0.073m was allocated from the HSF. The council remains committed to supporting food banks and exploring more sustainable income streams. For 2024/25:
- Stockport Food Network was chosen as the Mayor's Charity for 2024/25
 - The council is working in partnership with JCM Charitable Foundation⁴¹ to raise funds for Stockport Food Network.

School Meal Support Scheme

- 3.59 The council has successfully delivered the **School Meal Support Scheme**. The scheme was designed to provide paid-for school meals to low-income families that are not eligible for means-tested FSM for the 2023/24 academic year. Around 1300 pupils benefited from the scheme from circa 160 schools and colleges across Greater Manchester.

Quotes

"The meal support was vital for my family being a single parent to a child with special needs. I am extremely grateful for the help we received."

"This support has been amazing and has helped me so much as sometimes we don't have enough to pay for these school dinners once the bills are paid we are just surviving month to month but thank you very much x."

"Having just come out of a violent relationship & my income becoming 1/3 of what it was, this scheme made a huge difference, I really appreciated it. It meant my children got a nutritious hot meal especially during the winter months"

Action 4.4 – Review our debt recovery policy on the use of enforcement agents and ensure it is in line with national best practice.

- 3.60 The Council signed up to the Citizens Advice revised Collection of Council Tax Arrears Good Practice Protocol in March 2024 and are regularly meeting with internal and external partners to ensure best practice is followed.

Action 4.5 – Pilot sustainable models of affordable food provision such as community shops and pantries as an alternative to food banks.

⁴⁰ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/>

⁴¹ <https://www.jcmcharitablefoundation.co.uk/>

3.61 With funding from the Stockport Local Fund, Good Stuff Social Supermarket was established by Re:Dish in May 2024⁴². The initiative is open two days per week and serves the Reddish and Heaton Norris community and is delivered in partnership with Greater Together Manchester. Headlines:

- To date 104 residents have signed up for membership (£5)
- On average 40-45 people access the supermarket every week.

3.62 Over the next review period, the council will continue to support Re:Dish to further increase the number of members and increase the number of average weekly shops as well as continuing to work with VCFSE partners to explore opportunities to establish further affordable food provisions across the borough.

Action 4.6 – Disseminate information about our advice service through our registrars service.

3.63 Cost of Living information cards are distributed in all birth registration packs.

Action 4.7 – Ensure residents do not need to ‘tell their story’ repeatedly by designing joined up and person-centred help and advice.

3.64 As referenced in para. 3.32, the warm referral approach was adopted in 2023 across internal Council departments and the Trusted Partner network. The approach reduces the need for resident to repeat their story through ensuring that colleagues take time to listen to the resident, identify appropriate ways to help and passing that story on to relevant support organisations. The approach builds on the Making Every Contact Count (MECC) approach to tackling health inequalities.

Objective 5: To prevent next-generation poverty by working with children, young people and their families.

3.65 Key highlights for Objective 5 include:

Action 5.1 – Maximise the opportunity provided by Family Hubs to prevent child poverty

3.66 Family Hubs are a critical component of children’s transformation and a catalyst for wider neighbourhood and prevention ambitions to simplify access to the offer, address need earlier and reduce demand on costly statutory services. There are some critical factors in the success and sustainability of this programme. Amongst them are:

- Developing family hub bridges and a place-based workforce.
- Developing the digital offer.
- Investment in VCFSE relationships and engagement.

3.67 A phased approach to implementation has been taken to support effective delivery of the transformation programme and ensure the family hub networks are aligned to the already established Stockport Family geographical footprints. By September 2024, 7 family hub networks will have been launched across the borough supported by a virtual family hub. Each network will be bespoke to the community it serves. Key highlights:

- The early adopter areas of Brinnington and Werneth, Edgeley, and Offerton, Great Moor and Hazel Grove went live in October 2023 and have been

⁴² <https://www.redish.org.uk/copy-of-food-action-1>

supporting the prototype for further phases. Family hub site opportunities are still being scoped for the Offerton area.

- Phase 2 implementation went live in February 2024 and has focused on Heaton and Reddish, and a Town Centre launch took place May 2024. Phase 3 - Cheadle, Bramhall and Marple launched in July 2024.
- There will be less emphasis on designating family hub buildings and a greater focus on developing a local network of family hub bridges, which will facilitate and enhance access to the family hub offer. These places and people will have strong links to communities and trusted relationships or established connections with families, creating a wide breadth of access to information, help and support. So far, 170+ colleagues from across 11 organisations (including libraries, Life Leisure and Stockport Homes) have started the family hub bridge induction. There are a further 55 expressions of interest awaiting to onboard which include GPs, schools and VCFSE organisations.
- Virtual family hub developments include the development of the children and young people directory and working towards publishing the community offer. The family hubs online enquiry form has been updated to enrich and better understand the information we receive. Since launching in October 2023, 108 enquires received; 20% of which have been categorised as requiring debt/welfare/finance information or help. This is the highest reason for enquiry.
- A Family Hubs outcomes framework has been developed and will be presented to the Family Hubs Advisory Board in September 2024. Parents and carers have been encouraged to share their experience of the local family hub approach in a short online survey – 220 responses were received with analysis expected soon. The workforce will now be encouraged to share their views and experiences via an online survey. Findings will inform our workforce development and training plan.

Action 5.2 – Ensure children are ready for school by delivering our Start Well strategy

- 3.68 A key opportunity for Council services (to have impact and) to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for children, families and communities is by early intervention in pregnancy and early childhood particularly in the first 1001 critical days of life. A whole system approach working beyond early childhood services needs to be brought together to support children to get the best start in life. Working together with families and communities, every baby and young child needs the following foundations for success:
- Loving nurturing relationships.
 - Safe homes free from adversity.
 - Good early years development.
 - Good physical and mental health and access to healthcare.
- 3.69 In Autumn 2024, the Council will launch the refreshed Start Well 2024 – 2027 strategy. The process for refreshing the strategy has involved a systematic approach to reviewing original plans; evaluating outcomes; consideration of latest literature and research – local and national; government guidance; stakeholder engagement and learning from the experiences of families. The refreshed strategy builds on the foundations of the last three years and will have a strengthened focus on the first 1001 days of life, prevention and early intervention, vulnerable children (particularly boys) and families.
- 3.70 Key activity specific to preventing child poverty in the earliest years of life include:

- Prioritising the first 1001 days of life – 72 families with children under 2 received targeted HSF4 vouchers in 2023/24, benefitting 125 babies. Total amount spent £7500. The highest number of requests came from the Offerton, Hazel Grove and Great Moor footprint.
- Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC) continues as a successful peer led, professionally supported parenting programme. During the academic year 2023/24, 131 parents completed EPEC courses benefitting 245 children. 17 parents have also successfully gone on to complete the Parent Group Leader training. Since establishment in 2018, the EPEC Hub have trained and recruited 76 Parent Group Leaders, a number of whom have secured employment or gone into further training. The Hub have further developed inclusive practice and extended reach within marginalised communities. Engagement with dads has increased through virtual delivery and for the first time, working in partnership with YARAN, the 'Being a Parent' course has been delivered with non-English speaking parents and in Farsi. In September 2024, delivery will extend to Arabic speaking families.
- Increasing the uptake of Healthy Start remains a Start Well key performance indicator. In June 24, the overall uptake for Stockport families was 65.7%. The uptake in some wards is good e.g. Reddish South is 80.6%, whereas in other wards it is much lower e.g. Norbury and Woodsmoor 31.8%. The original action plan for increasing uptake has been refreshed and updated to consider Family Hub developments.

Action 5.3 – Deliver the poverty proofing programme widely in our schools and expand the offer to Early Years settings

- 3.71 In Stockport we have engaged with **Poverty Proofing** as part of our response to the inequality in our borough, recognising the impact of our context upon learning outcomes for our children. Our work is based on the approach developed by Children North East (CNE).
- 3.72 Poverty Proofing Stockport began in October 2018. Schools across Stockport are invited to work in small groups (up to 10 schools) over an 18-month period. During this time participating schools:
- Consider research about poverty, how it is identified and measured, how it can be different for different children and families, and how it can have an impact upon children and young people's ability to learn alongside peers who do not experience poverty.
 - Complete an attitudinal questionnaire and consider and reflect on the outcomes of the questionnaire considering new knowledge and understanding about poverty, both local and national.
 - Engage with CNE Poverty Proofing© the School Day audit.
 - Consider the 'Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study' and undertake school-based activities. Staff further develop their understanding about effective classroom practice that enhances learning opportunities for children and young people identified as living in or on the edges of poverty.
 - Reflect and share their individual school journey and changes that have been made to school policy and practice.
- 3.73 When each Poverty Proofing audit is completed, the school receive an audit report that outlines what works well and what actions are required to minimise barriers to learning identified during the visit.

- 3.74 The aspiration is for all schools in Stockport to take part because the programme enables schools to consider their policies and approaches, which in turn may drive practice change. This has been clearly evidenced in all those schools who have completed the audit. For example, where the parental feedback gathered through the programme demonstrated the concern families had about the cost of branded school uniform primary schools have changed their uniform policy. This has significantly reduced the financial pressure for some families.
- 3.75 To date, 32 schools (including 1 Nursery School) have engaged in Poverty Proofing Stockport, where they reflect on national and local poverty statistics, unconscious bias and stereotyping associated with living in poverty. 28 schools (including 1 Nursery School) have engaged in a CNE Poverty Proofing the school day audit, where the cost of the school day is reviewed with pupil voice and parental voice reflecting their lived experiences for the school their child attends.

Quotes

Headteacher – *“it is really interesting to hear other perspectives and the suggestions you have made are all manageable and will improve the school experience for our children”.*

Deputy Headteacher – *“It is really good to read and find out what we are doing well, and also gives us some starting points for the next steps in our work.”*

Headteacher – *‘It was interesting to see the research that people have done regarding deprivation and its impact on school learning. It was heartening to speak and meet with different schools to discuss these issues and the impact they have on us individually. It has helped us to develop our decision making and practice in school in terms of attempting to “poverty proof” aspects of the school year. Staff working directly with the project definitely have more awareness of the impact of poverty on school and we now want to roll this out further to the whole school community.’*

Headteacher – *“I’ve done staff training and I went through lots of statistics about children living in poverty and the impact. I then linked it with some of the recommendations from the research and audit. You could see staff, and you could hear them. There was like a visible ‘ohhh I hadn’t thought about that’. So, it was really good actually, straight away staff started sharing ideas on what they could do to improve things, and we know that it’s about changing attitudes and changing the way that we deal with things as a school. It doesn’t cost any more money it’s just how we deal with things.”*

- 3.76 Over the next review period, a further 10 schools have begun working on the Poverty Proofing Stockport programme with CNE Poverty Proofing audits organised for the academic year 2024/25.

Action 5.7 – Work with schools to make school uniforms affordable or establish other support to access uniforms.

- 3.77 Research⁴³ published by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) calculates that the cost of raising a child to age 18 as £166,000 for a couple and £220,000 for a lone parent. Further research by CPAG calculates that cost of going to school in the UK is at least £864.87 per year for primary school children and at least £1755.97 per year for secondary school children. This means that the total cost of meeting a child's minimum educational needs across all 14 years of school is £18,345.85. For some families, school uniform (for both primary and secondary school) is one of the most significant educational outlays they face and often has to be paid as a lump sum payment. The estimated annual cost of uniform, PE kit, shoes and bags for primary school pupils is £352.86 and £481.77 for secondary school pupils.
- 3.78 During 2023/24, the council spent £0.055m on awarding **Secondary School Uniform vouchers** worth £45 to eligible children to help support families with the cost of school uniforms. Eligible families were required to apply via an online application form which was assessed by the RAS team. The council's 2023/24 school uniform vouchers were only available to secondary school pupils in receipt of FSM meaning that there was no support for primary FSM pupils, or pupils that are in low income but are not eligible for FSM. Whilst the £45 voucher covers the average cost of a school blazer, the level of support falls short of the overall cost of the school uniform (paragraph 3.77). 2064 applications were submitted, of which 1562 were successful suggesting that ineligible families applied for support and that demand for school uniform support exists beyond secondary school pupils. Of the 1562 successful applications, 1221 vouchers were redeemed. To provide vouchers to all circa 3000 eligible secondary school pupils would require a budget of c.£0.135m. To provide vouchers to all primary and secondary FSM pupils, the budget would need to be c.£0.382m.
- 3.79 In June 2024, following a review of existing support (Council-funded secondary school vouchers, school and VCFSE offer), Cabinet took the decision move away from awarding secondary school uniform vouchers and to use HSF5 and Positive Investment funding to invest in an approach that would provide more sustainable, longer-term support. The new approach focuses on:
- Priority 1: Achieve long-term reduction in the cost of the school day by offering every state funded school in Stockport access to the Poverty Proofing project.
 - Priority 2: Establish a borough-wide pre-loved school uniform exchange programme in collaboration with partner organisations.
 - Priority 3: Establish and maximise wider support to help families with items including shoes, bags, PE Kits and digital devices.
 - Priority 4: Ensure families are supported to maximise their income through benefits and/or employment.
 - Priority 5: Support the climate-friendly borough strand of the Climate Action Now (CAN) strategy.
- 3.80 See Appendix 2 for delivery plan. Headline progress includes:
- 889 vouchers distributed across all primary schools to support Year 6 leavers with the cost of **purchasing secondary school uniforms**. Each school was provided vouchers based on their number of pupils in receipt of means-tested FSM taken from the 2024 Summer School Census. Vouchers were worth £50 per pupil. Schools were given flexibility over which pupils to award the vouchers to (this did not have to be limited to awarding to those in receipt of FSM). As of

⁴³ https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-02/Cost_of_a_Child_2023_summary.pdf

14 August, 653 vouchers have been redeemed (73%). Any unredeemed vouchers will be reallocated across the HSF5 delivery programme.

- Following a tender exercise, Cherry Tree Project CIC were awarded grant funding to set up and deliver the **Stockport School Uniform For All scheme**. It is intended that the scheme will be open year-round and will operate on a 'click and collect' model whereby families can select required items and collect from their chosen library. It is anticipated that the scheme will be live from October 2024.
- Public appeal commenced on 12 July to encourage families to donate pre-loved school uniform items and hand in to any library or Morrison's supermarket. All donated items received by 5 August were taken to Merseyway to support the **School Uniform Pop-Up Shop** which took place between 10 – 17 August 2024. Initial headline figures suggest that over 3000 items were either sold or handed out free of charge, with over £1000 raised in sales (over £450 was raised on the opening day alone). All stock leftover from the pop-up will be donated to the School Uniform For All scheme.
- The Council worked in partnership with Sedulo Foundation⁴⁴ to arrange for c.100 **Back To School Bags** to be distributed to Year 7 pupils starting at Reddish Vale High School in September. Reddish Vale High School was selected on the basis that they have completed the Poverty Proofing audit. Bags were distributed to Year 6 leavers currently attending Westmorland, Abingdon and Vale View Primary School. Pupils from St Mary's CoE Reddish will also be supported through an existing relationship with Sedulo.
- We have secured new non-branded school uniforms through donation from David Luke school uniform manufacturers⁴⁵.
- Stockport County have established a pilot **PE kit scheme**⁴⁶ for primary schools for 2024/25. The aim is to provide 3500 pupils with PE kits in time for the start of the 2024/25 academic year. Currently, around 30 schools have signed up.

Objective 6: To increase the numbers of people in affordable and stable housing and reduce homelessness

3.81 Key highlights for Objective 6 include:

Action 6.1 – Ensure that addressing poverty is a core theme across place-based policies such as the Local Plan

Action 6.2 – Maximise development opportunities

Action 6.3 – Enable access to available options for those most in need

Action 6.4 – 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

Action 6.5 – Work with partners to provide support for people moving into a tenancy (furniture, carpet, white goods etc)

Action 6.6 – Promote and support energy efficiency schemes.

Action 6.7 – Lobby and influence to bring about change in policy and practice at a subregional and national level

3.82 Highlights include:

⁴⁴ <https://sedulofoundation.org/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.davidluke.com/pages/community>

⁴⁶ <https://www.stockportcounty.com/club-launch-kits-by-county-campaign/>

- A new Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) was commissioned in March 2024. The HNA is undertaken every three years to have up-to-date, robust evidence base to shape the Local Plan and other housing related strategies. The HNA is also fundamental to support affordable housing requirements on housing sites that are brought forward by developers. The council published its revised Local Development Scheme (LDS) during Quarter 4 2023/24. The LDS sets the timeline for the progression of the plan which the council intends to submit to the Government for examination in June 2025.
- Homelessness remains a significant challenge within the borough as well as on a sub-regional and national basis. 2023/24 saw the highest-ever number of homelessness presentations within Stockport with 2,600 households seeking assistance against a long-term average of around 1,800. There is an acute shortage of affordable housing, with less than 600 social housing tenancies becoming available compared to 1,000 five years ago and almost no private sector tenancies with Local Housing Allowance rates. Within this context, expenditure on hotels for homeless people amounted to £650,000 during 2023/24 compared to £180,000 in 2022/23 – this may well exceed £1m in 2024/25. Rough sleeping levels are around 20 on any one night, more than double historic levels. Within this context, service developments have included: Forming a dedicated domestic abuse team and achieving Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation; rehousing 65 Ukrainian families within the private sector; delivering a health programme at temporary accommodation resulting in higher vaccination rates for children, cancer screening and access to drug and alcohol services; and extended and co-located advice and support from the Greater Manchester Youth Homelessness Programme and LGBT Domestic Abuse Service.
- The Council has an approved Housing Allocations Policy⁴⁷ which sets out how social housing will be allocated, including: who qualifies to apply; how households will be prioritised; and the processes to be used.
- A wide range of information is available on the Housing Standards web pages for both tenants and landlords. The information advises tenants what they should do if they have a problem with their property and also advises landlords how to be responsible. The Council works closely with a range of partners to ensure they are aware of how to report issues through to the team. During the next review period the team are in the process of producing a Bulletin that will be shared with all Members. The bulletin will provide an overview of the challenges that exist within the Private Rented Sector and provide information on how to advise and signpost people seeking assistance. Some content of the bulletin will be featured on the Team webpages. A full review of the Team webpages will be undertaken during Q3 and necessary amendments made. Plan to add content on 'help and advice' for tenants on to a range of social media platforms.
- Action 6.5 – Work with partners to provide support for people moving into a tenancy (furniture, carpet, white goods etc)
- Stockport continues to be part of the GM ECO4 Flex programme working with Improveasy as the designated contractor.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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4.1 Cabinet is asked to note the report.

5.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

5.1 Anyone requiring further information should contact Tom Plant by email on thomas.plant@stockport.gov.uk.