

Cheshire West & Chester Council

# a fairer future



Cheshire West  
and Chester

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# Forewords

I am delighted to share our first Fairer Future Strategy for Cheshire West and Chester, our long-term plan to tackle poverty. This strategy builds on the legacy of our previous Poverty Truth Commissions, putting the voices of those with first-hand experience of poverty at the heart of our approach and sets out how we will work together to build a fairer future for all.

The Coronavirus pandemic has had a huge impact on our lives and has highlighted and widened existing inequalities across our Borough. As we recover from the pandemic, most of us are feeling the impact of the rising cost of living, however, those who are already struggling to make ends meet are feeling the pressure even more.

In October 2020 the Council declared a Poverty Emergency, this strategy encapsulates the progress we have made to date and sets out our ambition to reduce poverty over the next ten years. It underlines our commitment to hear the voices of people experiencing poverty and take action to address the issues they raise. We will also deliver urgent support to tackle the immediate consequences of poverty, and work to transform society and the economy to tackle the underlying causes of poverty. We will review this strategy on a regular basis to ensure that it remains current, celebrates our success and achievements and responds to new challenges as they emerge.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the first Leader's Champion for Poverty and Inequality who led this agenda with such passion and laid the foundation for the development of this approach, and also to the current Leader's Champion who will continue this great work with equal determination.

Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to contribute their thoughts and ideas and helped to shape this document, in particular to the Community Inspirers, our residents with lived and living experience of poverty, who have given their time, shared their stories and worked so closely with us to shape this. I look forward to working together with all of us playing our part in building a fairer future for Cheshire West and Chester.

**Councillor Louise Gittins**

My involvement in this Strategy and the Poverty Truth Community all began at the start of my recruitment to the second West Cheshire Poverty Truth Commission two years ago. There were fifteen community inspirers and fifteen business, third sector, academics and faith leaders who were our mentors, all looked after by the Poverty Truth team within the council for 18 months.

When the Second Poverty Truth Commission made its final report the Cheshire West and Chester Council Cabinet decided to make poverty a priority area and set up the Poverty Truth Advisory Board. We were given the task of developing a Fairer Future

Strategy and have worked on it for 12 months. The Council declared a Poverty Emergency which passed at full council with cross party backing and a Leaders Champion for Poverty and Inequality was appointed.

The position of community inspirer co-chair is rotated every six months, Antony Spurway led the way.

*As the first Community Inspirer co-chair of the Poverty Advisory Board it was an honour to be selected. I was able to build upon the achievements and relationships in both Poverty Truth Commissions and implement our recommendations to change perceptions people face in the Borough, that poverty affects us all in different ways. Bringing my knowledge of this I helped in the design of how the board would work with the rest of the council and its partners. I was able to speak at full council about the poverty emergency motion and influence decision making by giving advice to council departments on policies up for review so that changes could be made. I outlined our Fairer Future strategy by bringing all our Community Inspirers together to help change lives.*

*I feel a great achievement that people have really listened to us to develop the Fairer Future strategy and make tackling the stigma of poverty a reality. We hope to see a change in mindset, policies and procedures, that will benefit all residents and make a great difference in improving their lives.*

**Antony Spurway – First Poverty Truth Advisory Board Co-Chair**

*When I first joined the Poverty Truth Commission I had absolutely no idea of what to expect, but I was very aware of the consequences of poverty and the effect that this has on people's lives. This was the fourth commission in the country and the first to be led by a local council, a very brave and forward looking step. It was ground-breaking, we had to do it ourselves, design everything starting from the beginning without any templates.*

*We had some really excellent individuals, business and civic leads who were influential in decision making. All dedicated to the ethos of 'nothing about us, without us, is for us'. Bridges had to be built slowly with the Inspirers, allowing them time to bravely share their stories of hardship and discrimination, from that moment we were all people working together as equals. Bonds were formed that allowed openness and honesty from both sides and with this came respect talking and understanding each others point of view. This would not have been possible without the mutual trust and respect that is at the heart of how we work together.*

*The journey myself and others involved who came through the door have been on has been amazing. We were allowed to speak, and we were listened to. Individuals who haven't had the breaks in life were not judged for the mistakes made, we were treated as human beings with feelings. Thank you to those people who took part on the first steps, we changed ways of working and those involved benefited from learning.*

*It doesn't cost a fortune to change people's lives all you have to do is support them, give them the right information and guide them through. We were all there through hope and we now hope this strategy will show everyone what we're going to do and how we're going to do it - we all have dream.*

**Barbara Dean – Second Poverty Truth Advisory Board Co-Chair**

I have just taken over the co-chair role in January and I look forward to working on delivering the Fairer Future strategy and working with the poverty truth advisory board moving forward.

I endorse this strategy as properly co-produced with lived experience of poverty, business and third sector officers, and the council officers who work with us. My thanks to all.

**Gus Cairns – Poverty Truth Advisory Board Co-Chair**

## **Purpose**

This strategy is designed to guide the efforts of the Council, its partners, and local communities to tackle the consequences and root causes of poverty and deliver a fairer future for all. This will be a living document that will be refreshed and monitored regularly to ensure we have a responsive, person-centred approach to addressing poverty, with equality and social justice at its heart.

The Council declared a Poverty Emergency in October 2020, a concept that originated within Cheshire West and Chester Council, with strong cross-party support, becoming one of the first areas nationally to formalise this approach. The declaration highlighted important disparities between communities as well as the scale of poverty facing many residents and set out a radical new approach to tackle poverty. It also put forward a commitment to collaborate with partners and local people with lived and living experience of poverty, underpinned by a pro-active, evidence-based approach.

As a result of the declaration, a new Council priority to tackle the Poverty Emergency has been agreed, placing the issue at the heart of the organisation. A Poverty Truth Advisory Board (PTAB) has been established, with public, private, and civic sector representatives, as well as residents with lived and living experience of poverty. The Board is guiding the local response, including the development of this strategy, to seed permanent change and create a fairer future for all.

The Council is committed to taking a non-stigmatising, social justice approach to tackling poverty. Poverty Emergencies are avoidable and through working together to implement this strategy, taking a robust evidence-based and lived experience-informed approach, we will set in place a national model of excellence and a path to a fairer future for all. We pledge to apply these principles in our engagement with residents, communities, and partners, and promote them within and beyond our Borough.

## **Our ambition**

This strategy is being published amidst the most significant health, social and economic crisis of modern times, a crisis which has produced some startling revelations about the extent to which those in poverty have suffered a disproportionate loss of life and level of suffering.

Our ambition is to drive a significant reduction in the number of people in the borough experiencing poverty and financial hardship however, measuring our progress in achieving this is not easy. There is no universally accepted definition of poverty and there is a national conversation about the best ways to measure poverty. Data available to us at a local level is also limited.

We do have data on child poverty, official statistics show that 7,267 children aged 0-15 lived-in low-income families in Cheshire West and Chester, 12 per cent of our children<sup>1</sup>.

**If everyone plays their part, including the Council, local partners, business, residents, and central Government by 2032 we aim to half the number of children living in absolute poverty. This would be a reduction of 3,634 children living in low-income families.**

We are expecting a new, national measure of poverty to be developed and we will reassess our target as new and improved measured become available.

To reflect the ambition of this strategy by 2032, and hopefully sooner, we want all local people to agree with this statement:

***I am proud to live in an area committed to building a fairer future for all, where everyone understands and cares about social justice and where we all play our part to make sure people from all backgrounds have opportunities to improve their situation and quality of life throughout their lifetime.***

This strategy has been developed based upon three pillars, which are key to delivering this ambition

- **Voice** – hearing the voices of people experiencing poverty and acting to address the issues they raise.
- **Alleviation** – delivering urgent action to tackle the immediate consequences of poverty.
- **Root Cause** – transforming society and the economy to tackle the underlying causes of poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> Children living in absolute poverty before housing costs, DWP, March 2021

# Our guiding principles

## The Poverty Emergency

The Poverty Emergency declaration set out a 'people and planet' approach setting poverty alongside climate in providing the framework for a fairer, greener recovery following the coronavirus pandemic. This is central to our long-term strategic commitment and signals a change in our approach to tackling poverty as a result of the declaration.

The declaration sets out a number of commitments by the Council to:

- Treat poverty as an equalities and fairness issue.
- Work together to gather better quality evidence on the impacts of poverty, including the full range of disproportionate impacts of the crisis on those struggling on low incomes.
- Put lived experience at the heart of our approach.
- Provide the spaces and opportunity for those affected by low income to gather, learn, strengthen, and support one another in raising their democratic voice on the issues that directly affect them, locally and nationally.
- Explore routes to incorporate Community Wealth-Building and Collective Ownership approaches that address low income and environmental concerns, with a focus on the communities most harshly economically impacted by the crisis.
- Collaborate, work collectively, and celebrate one another's successes across councils.
- Put working together to solve the root causes of poverty at the heart of our agenda, recognising that poverty is not a lifestyle choice.

The full Poverty Emergency declaration is available at Appendix A.

## How this strategy has been developed

In line with the Poverty Emergency declaration, a number of guiding principles have been put into action to shape this strategy.

**Participation:** This strategy has been co-produced with individuals with lived and living experience of poverty and been informed by engagement with the wider community. Further details on the co-production and consultation process are included in the Fairer Future Engagement Findings report.

**Collaboration:** The Poverty Truth Advisory Board, the Health and Wellbeing Board, the voluntary and community sector and a wide range of local partner organisations have been engaged in the development process to ensure this is a strategy for the Borough not just the Council.

**Evidence based:** The actions in the strategy have been shaped by local qualitative and quantitative data as well as national data, research, and leading practice. Keele

University is evaluating initial stakeholder awareness and perceptions of the Poverty Emergency declaration and relationships are being forged with a range of expert organisations.

**Additionality:** This strategy goes beyond summarising what we already do as new perspectives and actions and creative approaches are required to tackle these issues.

**Action and impact focused:** This strategy is rightly visionary, but this will be accompanied with a clear action plan and measures of success.

**Living:** This is a ten-year strategy, and the ambition and Poverty Emergency principles and commitments will be consistent through that period; however, the action plan will be sensitive to latest circumstances and will be refreshed collaboratively on an ongoing basis.

**Spheres of influence:** This strategy has clarity on what is within the direct control of the Council; what actions we will influence through our partners at a local levels and proposals to national government to drive change.

**Equalities and social justice:** Poverty is treated within this strategy as an equalities and social justice issue, placing a responsibility on all aspects of society and public services to tackle the issue.

**Awareness-raising:** much of the evidence relating to the underlying causes of poverty are not commonly understood. Our approach aims to stimulate informed discussion and response at every level.

**Connected:** This strategy does not exist in isolation and recognises that the causes of poverty are wide ranging. Many existing strategies and programmes of work are underway within the borough to help reduce inequality and tackle poverty.

## Fairer Future Engagement

To support the development of this strategy and action plan extensive public engagement and perception research was undertaken between October 2021 and February 2022, including:

- Strategy engagement workshops: over 10 dedicated workshops with Community inspirers, staff, Elected Members and community and voluntary organisations.
- Conference break-out sessions- specific engagement at both the Cheshire and Warrington Annual Conference, and Inclusive Economy Conference
- Participate Now - online public engagement using the Council's digital engagement platform called Participate Now.
- Discussion at key forums; including the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- Participate Panel survey - spotlight questions on public perceptions with the Council's Citizens Panel.
- Engagement materials and tools for groups to use.

## **Links to other strategies and work programmes**

This strategy does not intend to duplicate any of the work that is already in progress but seeks to complement and support delivery of key agendas including:

- Affordable Warmth Plan
- Becoming a Marmot Community
- Cheshire West Place Plan
- Climate emergency
- Compact for West Cheshire
- Digital Inclusion Partnership
- Food Strategy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Inclusive Economy Prospectus
- Local Bus Strategy
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- No More Suicide Partnership
- Social Value Policy
- West Cheshire Sustainable Food Place

There are particularly strong links with the Inclusive Economy Prospectus, which outlines how we will build a new approach to our economy, centred not only on traditional economic growth, but on ensuring that wealth is more evenly distributed across our communities; and actively prioritising support, resources and economic innovations in a way that narrows the gaps between communities in terms of income, access to services and overall wellbeing.

### **Becoming a Marmot Community**

Inspired by the work of Michael Marmot on the social and economic determinants of health inequalities, Cheshire and Merseyside is now working to achieve Marmot Community status, though a determined and joint effort across of number of sectors in order to undertake collaborative action to achieve six shared goals:

- Give every child the best start in life
- Enable all children, young people, and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
- Create fair employment and good work for all
- Ensure healthy standard of living for all
- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
- Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention

Through this strategy we will seek to support the Marmot approach through close collaborative working. The adoption of the Marmot Community approach is key to acknowledging that everyone has a role to play in tackling health inequalities and improving the health and wellbeing of our residents.

# Our Poverty Truth Approach

The first West Cheshire Poverty Truth Commission (PTC) was set up in 2017 with the aim of tackling the underlying causes of poverty and helping to address gaps in services and inequalities across the Borough. The Commission aimed to give a face to the facts by creating safe spaces for Community Inspirers, those with lived and living experience of poverty, to share their stories. It also provided opportunities for those making and influencing decisions to listen and act upon what they heard. The Poverty Truth Commission ensured that people with lived experience were at the heart of decisions on tackling poverty and inequality. The success of the first commission led to the launch of a second commission in 2019 that ran until March 2020.

## Who are Community Inspirers?

Community Inspirers are a group of dedicated volunteers with lived experience of financial hardship. They have been instrumental in influencing many positive changes locally through their involvement with the Poverty Truth Commissions, Poverty Truth Advisory Board and the Council.

## Key Poverty Truth Commission achievements

- Creating a voice and empowering Inspirers to contribute to a range of Council and partner agency work.
- Strengthened relationships between Community Inspirers, civic leaders, and partner agencies.
- Community Inspirers were listened to and able to influence change by sharing their lived experience of poverty.
- Developed the 'How we live' film to highlight experiences of poverty.
- Community Inspirers were able to gain the confidence to speak publicly, secure employment and volunteering opportunities, develop their learning and become more independent.
- Community Inspirers spoke in parliament in relation to changes to the benefit system.
- Development of Poverty Truth Commission Pledge with partner agencies.
- Poverty Truth Commission used as a starting point for new, more collaborative models of working across the Council, the community and voluntary sector, businesses, and the wider community.
- Developed new support for front line staff to understand the story of the person in front of them including their challenges, stresses and often complex problems, and the need for compassion, empathy and making any difference they can, no matter how small. A number of Community Inspirers have become engaged at a national level through the Poverty Truth Network by contributing to national movement and taking on trustee roles.

## How We Live

'How We Live' is a short, powerful film which raises awareness and understanding of the issues young people face that are caused by poverty. The film script was developed with young people from the borough and is largely shot through the eyes of a young person and was created as part of the work with young inspirers from Poverty Truth Commission. It is available to watch here <https://vimeo.com/436637422/0131138a82>.

On-line workshops have been created around the film to help influence the change that we want to see within the lives of young people. This training was launched in September 2020 and by December 2021 had been accessed by over 670 staff from across organisations in Cheshire West and Chester and young people. Feedback on the film and training has been overwhelmingly positive, with over 90 per cent of staff reporting that it will significantly improve their working practice.

The Poverty Truth Commissions have now ended, but the commitment to embedding lived experience within the work of the Council remains. The creation of a Leader's Champion for Poverty and Inequality role, and the subsequent Poverty Emergency declaration, has ensured that the focus remains fixed on lived and living experience of poverty, and incorporates a more robust account of evidence, is social justice-based, and responds to the experience of the coronavirus pandemic.

Our aspiration is to support genuine pathways out of poverty, however, there are some limitations in the impact that can be had at a local level. Therefore, we will be clear about where our investment and intervention are providing alleviation and where our intervention is attempting to tackle the underlying causes of poverty. We will work in partnership with other councils that are adopting a similar approach to tackling the root causes of poverty and will share insight, good practice, and local success stories through enhanced data collection and reporting through our Fairer Future webspace. We will work with others with expertise and interest in tackling poverty, including universities, research organisations and trade unions.

To further strengthen this approach, we have created a Poverty Truth Advisory Board. Working together through the Board with partners we have achieved the following since the Poverty Emergency declaration:

- Encouraged the creation of Citizens Advice Access Points to move co-ordinated benefits and other support closer to the heart of our communities and break down digital and other barriers to getting the right support at the right time.
- Contributed to decision-making about Council Tax Support and other strands of funding support for residents on low incomes through the pandemic.

- Secured funding by Keele University to research our lived experience model, initial perceptions of our new approach and help us to ascertain how best to blend those approaches.
- Designed and launched Poverty Emergency web pages.
- Generated media interest in the Poverty Emergency through press releases, radio interviews, podcasts, and creation of videos for social media.
- Inspired eight other councils to join us in declaring a Poverty Emergency and working more collaboratively across councils on poverty and best practice.
- Presented at conference events and a university symposium.
- Participated in a bespoke research project developed in partnership with Keele and Chester Universities, including workshops exploring 'evidence versus narrative' in poverty.
- A blog written by a Community Inspirer was featured by Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.
- Supported work on food security with the 'Beans on Toast' group.
- Further developed the work of the Homelessness, Housing and Legal Advocacy Working Group to produce a legal rights resource and establish a dedicated partnership with Chester University to increase advocacy support and gain more insight into demand and what kinds of support people most need.

# Our Challenge

## Poverty in context, a national and local challenge

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*“Poverty means not being able to heat your home pay your rent or buy the essentials for your children. It means waking up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty, and impossible decisions about money. It means facing marginalisation – and even discrimination – because of your financial circumstances. The constant stress it causes can overwhelm people, affecting them emotionally and depriving them of the chance to play a full part in society (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016).”*

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Poverty is when someone doesn't have access to the material resources, they require to both meet basic needs and to participate fully in society. There are two commonly used measures of poverty:

- people in relative low income – living in households with income below 60 per cent of the median in that year. In 2019/20, 60 percent of the median household income was £328 per week (£17,056 per annum).
- people in absolute low income – living in households with income below 60 per cent of (inflation-adjusted) median income in some base year, usually 2010/11.

Income can be measured before or after housing costs are deducted, and poverty is calculated based on these different definitions of income.

In terms of relative low income in the UK in 2019/20, 11.7 million people (18 per cent) are in relative low income before housing costs and 14.5 million (22 per cent) after housing costs. This includes 3.2 million children (23 per cent) in relative low income before housing costs and 4.3 million after housing costs (31 per cent).<sup>3</sup>

in the UK in 2019/20 9.2 million people (14 per cent) are in absolute low income before housing costs, and 11.7 million people (18 per cent) are in absolute low income after housing costs. This includes 2.4m children (17 per cent) before housing costs and 3.5m children (25 per cent) after housing costs.<sup>4</sup>

The depth and persistence of poverty is an important factor that will be considered within this strategy. An increasing proportion of the UK is experiencing the very deepest level of poverty. The proportion of people living 50 per cent or more below the poverty line is 7 per cent in 2018/19, compared to 5 per cent in 2000/01.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> What is Poverty, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/our-work/what-is-poverty>

<sup>3</sup> Households Below Average Income, DWP, 2019/20

<sup>4</sup> Households Below Average Income, DWP, 2019/20

<sup>5</sup> Measuring Poverty 2020, Social Metrics Commission, 2020

An individual is defined as being in persistent low income if they have been in relative low income for at least three out of the past four years. Between 2015 and 2019, 9 per cent of individuals were in persistent low income before housing costs and 13 per cent were in persistent low income after housing costs, based on data from the Understanding Society survey.<sup>6</sup>

There is evidence that negative consequences are worse for families the longer they spend, and the deeper they are, in poverty. Recent research published by Daniel Edmiston has shown how the depth and profile of UK poverty has shifted in a way is not easy to capture within official statistics<sup>7</sup>. Analysis of degrees of poverty and social characteristics shows that the likelihood of falling into deep poverty has increased most for women, children, Black people, larger families, and those in full time work.

Poverty also has an impact on personal, emotional, mental health and self-worth. According to authors of *The Inner Level*, Richard Wilkinson, and Kate Pickett<sup>8</sup>, self-doubt, social anxiety, stress, and fear of how we are seen by others intensifies the greater the degree of inequality present. Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that low social status is associated with elevated levels of stress hormones.

The national policy response to the coronavirus pandemic, including the short-term and longer-term impact of lockdown on the local, national, and global economy, may lead more people into hardship. Lower income groups were most vulnerable to the pandemic and significant and longstanding health inequalities were exposed. While unemployment appears to be reducing and earnings appear to be improving, the impact of the pandemic on growth and the structure of the economy remains a challenge, and the full and long-term effect on people in deep poverty remains unknown. There has been a significant decrease in the wage share as a proportion of GDP over time and continued rising inequality of wealth and income. Continued restrictions on benefits have impacted on income levels for people out-of-work and in-work.

In line with our Poverty Emergency declaration, we have worked closely with trade unions and universities to broaden the evidence-base that informs this strategy, producing a new, more complete, and respectful narrative and identifying new actions that take account of the wider context of poverty and its causes. We also seek to focus on the impact of poverty on the personal, emotional, mental health and wellbeing of residents.

The Poverty in the UK report published by the House of Commons Library identifies that early analysis of available data suggests that poverty will increase over the next few years, and that low-income households are particularly vulnerable to the economic effects of the pandemic.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> DWP, *Income Dynamics, 2010 to 2019*, 25 March 2021.

<sup>7</sup> <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/depth-and-profile-of-uk-poverty/>

<sup>8</sup> *The Inner Level: How more equal societies reduce stress, restore sanity, and improve everybody's wellbeing*, Richard Wilkinson, and Kate Pickett, 2018

<sup>9</sup> *Poverty in the UK report*, House of Commons Library, 2021

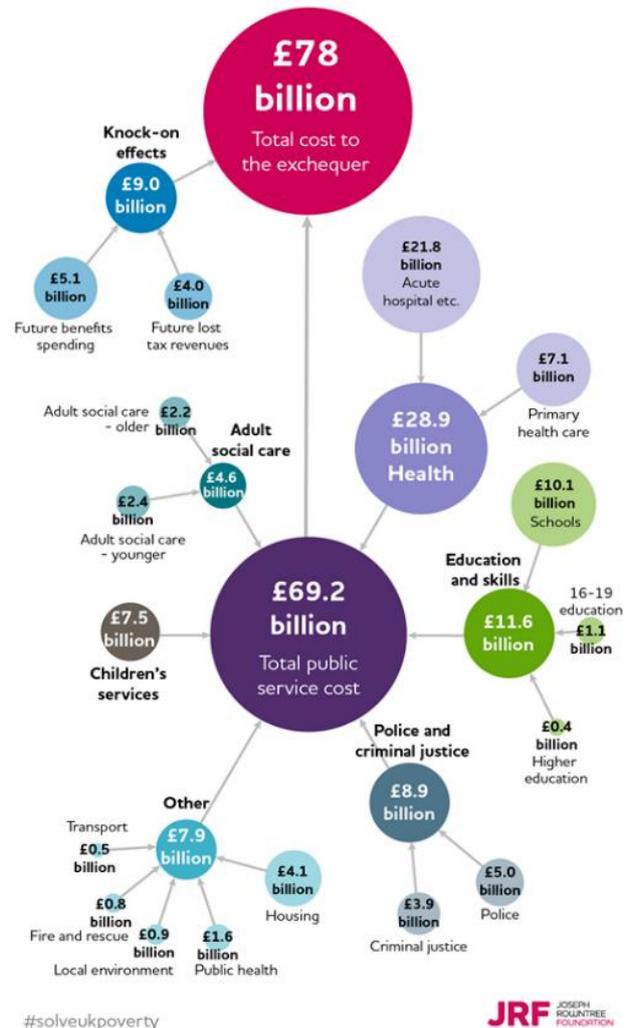
A report published in 2016 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation 'Counting the cost of UK poverty'<sup>10</sup> estimated that £78bn of public spending across the UK is linked to dealing with poverty and its consequences. This includes spending on healthcare, education, justice, and child and adult social services. It also places a major challenge on the success of the economy, with a significant amount of people not in a position to reach their potential.

## The causes and consequences of poverty

The causes and consequences of poverty are complex and interrelated. Almost anyone can experience poverty in their lifetime. Events such as bereavement, illness, redundancy, or relationship breakdown can place almost anyone into the most challenging circumstances that can be difficult to escape from. However, poverty tends to be cyclical and inter-generational because of factors that anchor it in place, such as cultural and class-related inequalities and the poverty premium. There are also strong links between poverty and poorer health, disability, and often stress-related behaviours that can further impact on health such as smoking.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation have investigated the cycle of poverty, and the factors that can trap individuals in poverty and disadvantage and although there are a range of actions, we can take to help break this cycle, a multi-faceted approach is required which tackles causes and consequences as set out within this strategy. What is clear is that poverty isn't inevitable – it can and has changed particularly through the collaborative actions of government, society, and business.

The cost of poverty to the UK's exchequer



## Who is most likely to experience poverty?

Some people in society are likely to experience higher rates of poverty, including children, people in families not containing full-time workers, people in lone parent families, disabled people and families including a disabled person, people in families with three or more children, people in rented accommodation, and people in

<sup>10</sup> Counting the cost of UK poverty, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016

households headed by someone of non-White ethnicity (particularly those of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or Black ethnicity). Women are most likely to be single parents and carers dependent upon fixed incomes or low pay, within a climate of rapidly rising living costs<sup>11</sup>.

## **How poverty is experienced locally**

Cheshire West is home to over 343,000 people. Its diverse places are attractive and prosperous and afford residents a good quality of life. Health, education, and incomes are all above average, crime is low, and the economy is productive and growing, with specialisms and assets that make it well placed to thrive into the future. However, this good average performance masks persistent inequalities and there are pockets of intense inequality in opportunities and incomes, housing, health, and both digital and transport connectivity affecting both urban and rural communities.

### **Geography**

There are pockets of deprivation across Cheshire West and Chester, with over 24,000 residents living in small neighbourhoods (LSOAs) that rank in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in England. Two of these neighbourhoods, in Lache and Winsford, are in the two per cent most deprived areas in England.

Highest levels of deprivation are concentrated within urban areas, in the city of Chester and towns of Ellesmere Port, Northwich and Winsford although dispersed rural poverty is also a challenge.<sup>12</sup>

### **Child Poverty**

Work undertaken by the Department for Work and Pensions (2014) found that the key factor for child poverty is parental worklessness and low earnings. The other main factors include low parental qualifications, parental ill health, family instability and family size.<sup>13</sup>

There are a range of factors that increase the risk of a poor child growing up to be a poor adult. The most influential factor that increases the risk of a poor child becoming a poor adult is child educational attainment, followed by low parental qualifications, parental ill health, child ill health, the home environment, children's non-cognitive skills and childhood poverty itself.

Official statistics show that 7,267 children aged 0-15 lived-in families in absolute low-income in Cheshire West and Chester, 12 per cent of children.<sup>14</sup>

The percentage of children in poverty (after housing costs) in Cheshire West and Chester in 2019/20 was 24.7 per cent.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Family Resources Survey, Department for Work and Pensions, 2018/19

<sup>12</sup> English Indices of Deprivation, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2019

<sup>13</sup> Children in poverty: Measurement and targets, Department for Work and Pensions, 2014

<sup>14</sup> Children living in absolute poverty before housing costs, DWP, March 2021,

<sup>15</sup> End Child Poverty Report, Centre for Research in Social Policy Loughborough University, 2020

## Life chances

Social mobility is about ensuring everyone has a fair chance to reach their full potential and that opportunities for a good quality of life are open to all. Cheshire West and Chester ranks 248 out of 324 local authorities in terms of overall social mobility, within the worst 25% of local authorities. For youth social mobility, the Borough ranks 303 is identified as a 'cold spot' for youth social mobility by the Social Mobility Commission.

The pandemic is likely to have increased existing educational inequalities. We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has widened the attainment gap between most and least disadvantaged pupils in the UK. This is due to a range of factors including the digital divide, home learning environments and potentially deepening poverty over the pandemic.<sup>16</sup> At every stage of education, in every part of the UK, children from better-off backgrounds achieve better results at school than those from disadvantaged backgrounds

The number of pupils receiving free schools' meals has risen steadily since from 11 per cent in 2017 to 17.7 per cent in 2021.

In Cheshire West and Chester 72% of pupils achieved a good level of development at the end of their reception year. This is equal to the England average. Of those pupils who were eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) only 53% achieved a good level of development, compared to an England average of 57%.<sup>17</sup>

Within Cheshire West and Chester, disadvantaged pupils (those in receipt of free school meals, looked after or adopted from care) on average score 18 points lower at attainment 8 than non-disadvantaged pupils. The average attainment 8 score for Cheshire West and Chester is 52, for disadvantaged pupils 38 and non-disadvantaged 56. (Attainment 8 is used to calculate the achievement of a pupil across eight qualifications including Mathematics and English).<sup>18</sup>

Almost a third of pupils with SEND (32.4 per cent) live in Cheshire West and Chester neighbourhoods ranked within the 20 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods in England (IMD Q1), this is 3,520 pupils. In comparison 18.9 per cent of pupils with no identified SEND live in the most deprived neighbourhoods.<sup>19</sup>

A report by the Child Poverty Action Group noted that children who have lived in persistent poverty during their first seven years have a cognitive development score on average 20% below those of children who have never experienced poverty.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> UK Poverty Report 2022, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2022

<sup>17</sup> Children's Centre Profile all Cheshire West and Chester Footprints, Cheshire West and Chester Council, May 2019

<sup>18</sup> Attainment statistics, Department of Education, 2021

<sup>19</sup> SEND JSNA, Cheshire West and Chester Council

<sup>20</sup> The effects of poverty, Child Poverty Action Group

In 2020, 3.7% of young people in the Borough were not in education, employment, or training. This is an increase of 1% since 2019. This is higher in our more deprived wards and was over 10% in four of our deprived wards.<sup>21</sup>

## Early years

Low birth weight is an indicator of poor population health. At children's centre level, the lowest percentage of low birth weights in 2018-20 was in Chester Victoria (5.5%) while the highest, in Blacon, was nearly double (11.7%).

Obesity rates are highest for children from the most deprived areas, and this is getting worse. Children aged 5 and from the poorest income groups are twice as likely to be obese compared to their most well-off counterparts and by age 11 they are three times as likely.<sup>22</sup> (Childhood obesity: a plan for action - GOV.UK).

## Health

Health inequalities persist and life expectancy, the average number of years someone can expect to live, is lower in our more deprived areas compared to less deprived areas. In Cheshire West and Chester, the inequality gap for men has decreased but remains wider than for women. The gap is 9.8 years for men and 7.8 years for women.<sup>23</sup> At ward level many areas have a significantly lower life expectancy for both male and female, with these concentrated in the most deprived areas.<sup>24</sup>

Public Health England's 2020–25 strategy identifies smoking, poor diet, physical inactivity and high alcohol consumption as the four principal behavioural risks to people's health in England today. These risks are concentrated in the most disadvantaged groups. For example, smoking prevalence in the most deprived fifth of the population is 28 per cent, compared to 10 per cent in the least deprived fifth.<sup>25</sup>

Evidence suggests that some people's circumstances make it harder for them to move away from unhealthy behaviours, particularly if they are worse off in terms of a range of wider socio-economic factors such as debt, housing or poverty.<sup>26</sup>

The World Health Organisation in 2014 reported a strong socio-economic gradient in mental health, with people of lower socioeconomic status having a higher likelihood of developing and experiencing mental health problems. Employment status is linked to mental health outcomes, with those who are unemployed or economically inactive having higher rates of common mental health problems than those who are employed.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> School and pupil numbers, Department of Education

<sup>22</sup> Childhood Obesity – a plan for action, Department for Health, 2018

<sup>23</sup> Inequality in life expectancy at birth 2018-2020, PHE fingertips

<sup>24</sup> Life expectancy and mortality rates 2018, JSNA Cheshire West and Chester Council

<sup>25</sup> Public Health England's 2020–25 strategy, PHE, 2020

<sup>26</sup> Pathways to health inequalities, Kings Fund, 2020

<sup>27</sup> Mental health and wellbeing in England: Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2014

Suicide rates are two to three times higher in the most deprived neighbourhoods compared to the most affluent, and rates of hospitalised self-harm are also twice as high.<sup>28</sup>

In terms of COVID-19, people living in more socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods and minority ethnic groups have higher rates of almost all of the known underlying clinical risk factors that increase the severity and mortality of COVID-19. Office for National Statistics data shows that people who live in the most deprived areas of England and Wales are around twice as likely to die after contracting COVID-19.<sup>29</sup> Local data also shows that the most deprived areas of the borough have seen the highest rates of infection.

### **Housing and Homelessness**

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report that those on low income spend proportionately more of their income on housing costs. People living in rented accommodation (social or private rent) are more likely to be in relative low income after housing costs are accounted for, than people who own their own home.

Affordability of housing, relationship breakdown and poverty can all lead to homelessness and rough sleeping. Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) official statistics show that between July to September 2021, 398 households in Cheshire West and Chester were initially assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness and owed a statutory homelessness duty.<sup>30</sup>

In 2021, there were over 7,000 households on the social housing waiting list.<sup>31</sup>

### **Securing Essentials**

The Food Foundation states that 3.6% (1 million) adults reported that they or someone in their household have had to go a whole day without eating in the past month because they couldn't afford or access food (January 2022). They also found the poorest fifth of UK households would need to spend 40% of their disposable income on food to meet Eatwell Guide costs. This compares to just 7% for the richest fifth.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that 43% of households in receipt of Universal Credit are food insecure and lone parent families with children in poverty are the household type most likely to suffer food insecurity.

In 2020/21, some 22,427 food parcels were distributed to Cheshire West and Chester residents, 8,814 of these were to children. This was an increase of 36% from the 16,494 distributed in 2019/20.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Dying from Inequality, Samaritans, 2017

<sup>29</sup> ONS – Deaths due to COVID-19

<sup>30</sup> Initial assessments of statutory homelessness duties owed England, July to September 2021

<sup>31</sup> Numbers of households on local authorities' housing waiting lists, GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

<sup>32</sup> Trussell Trust: End of year stats End of Year Stats, The Trussell Trust, 2021

Those in poverty often pay a more for the same essential goods and services, for example energy tariffs, as they are not able to access the same deals. Bristol University estimates that on average, in 2019, low-income households incurred £478 of extra costs through 'poverty premiums'.<sup>33</sup>

In Cheshire West and Chester, 12% (17,869) of households are 'fuel poor' (based on sub-regional fuel poverty statistics). The Office for National Statistics reports that growing energy prices will disproportionality impact on those with lower incomes, as they spend a higher proportion of their income on utility bills.<sup>34</sup>

In a digital age, those not engaging effectively with the digital world are at risk of being left behind. ONS research found that older people, disabled people, those from lower income households and people living alone are least likely to use the internet. The Digital Exclusion Risk Index looks at the likelihood that residents in a neighbourhood will be digitally excluded. The Index suggests around 8% (28,000) of Cheshire West and Chester residents are living in neighbourhoods defined as having a higher risk of digital exclusion. This includes a mix of urban and rural neighbourhoods.<sup>35</sup>

## **Transport**

The JRF report UK Poverty 2020/21 identified transport as being a significant barrier that kept people trapped in poverty. Lower-income workers are more likely to use the bus or walk to work and people on a low wage are more likely to work atypical hours, when there is a more likely to be a lack of appropriate public transport.

At the time of the 2011 Census, 19% (26,297) households in Cheshire West and Chester had no car or van compared to 26% in England. Half of households in very small neighbourhoods (Output Areas) with average household income below £17,000, did not have a car or van. This constrains their access to employment. (2011 Census data and Paycheck income data).

## **Work and wages**

The current unemployment rate for the borough is 3.5 per cent, compared to 4.7 per cent for the North West and 4.8 per cent nationally.<sup>36</sup> Many wards have significantly higher unemployment. Central & Grange, Westminster, Wolverham, and Blacon all have rates of unemployment (as measured by the claimant count) above 7 per cent; compared to 3.3 per cent on average for the borough.<sup>37</sup>

The average wage of a residents before tax (gross) has been increasing since 2016 and as of 2020 for a full-time job is £601.2, this is higher than the regional £589.80 and national average wage of £560.30. However, average wages for local employers are lower £598.50, compared to the UK average of £612.80 indicating

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<sup>33</sup> The Poverty Premium: A Customer Perspective, Bristol University, 2020

<sup>34</sup> Sub-regional Fuel Poverty Data 2021 - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

<sup>35</sup> Digital Exclusion Risk Index, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, 2021

<sup>36</sup> Model Based unemployment, Annual population survey, ONS, Oct 20 - Sept 21

<sup>37</sup> Claimant Count by Ward, ONS, Dec 2021

that those residents working locally earn less than those who commute elsewhere.  
38

To date, the pandemic has had more of an impact on the labour market status of age groups. Young workers and workers aged 65+ have been most likely to have left employment and have seen the biggest increase in unemployment. For young people aged 16-24 employment has fallen by 5 per cent and for older workers aged 65+ by 5 per cent.<sup>39</sup>

In Cheshire West, 18 per cent of the workforce was furloughed in July 2020, above national and regional rates, this halved to 4 per cent by September 2021.<sup>40</sup>

The accommodation and food services within the borough were hit the hardest during the pandemic, in Jan 2021, 26 per cent of all furlough staff were working in that sector, with wholesale and retail, repair of motor vehicles at 20 per cent, followed by both arts, entertainment and recreation and manufacturing at 8 per cent. All these sectors saw reductions as covid restrictions eased and parts of the economy reopened.<sup>41</sup>

The definition of a living wage by the Living Wage Foundation for 2020 was £9.30 per hour. In 2020 15.2% of the jobs within the borough were below the living wage, this compares to 21.3% for the North West and 20.2% nationally. Whilst this information is not available at ward level, it is available at parliamentary constituency, Ellesmere Port and Neston has the highest percentage of jobs below the living wage at 21.7% around 1 in 5 jobs, with Eddisbury at 19.5%, followed by Weaver Vale 16.8% and finally City of Chester 11.4%<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings Resident & Workplace Analysis, ONS, 2021

<sup>39</sup> Coronavirus Impact on the Labour Market, House of Commons Briefing, Dec 2021

<sup>40</sup> CJRS and PAYE Real Time Information, HMRC, 2021

<sup>41</sup> CJRS and PAYE Real Time Information, HMRC, 2021

<sup>42</sup> Annual Survey of earnings and hours ASHE, ONS, 2021

## **Pillar One: Voice**

### **Hearing the voices of people experiencing poverty and acting to address the issues they raise.**

*Nothing about us, without us, is for us.*

All too often plans intended to tackle poverty have not had the desired impact, because they haven't been shaped by the people they are intended to support.

The West Cheshire Poverty Truth Commissions have been a key vehicle for involving people with lived experience in public debate, in identifying local priorities for actions, and sharing the experiences of what it is like to live life with poverty. The commitment to embedding the voice of people with lived and living experience of poverty is a lasting impact of the Poverty Truth Commissions, further emphasised in the Poverty Emergency. Their mantra 'nothing about us, without us, is for us' is critical and sits at the centre of the development of this strategy.

As part of the delivery of this strategy we will continue to listen and amplify the voices of people with lived and living experience of poverty through the development of a range of tools and resources. The stories and experiences of Community Inspirers have been a catalyst for service change and have influenced decision making and policy. We will build upon our resources co-produced with Community Inspirers, such as 'How We Live' and the 'Poverty Truth Pledge' to make sure we are reaching a wide range of people.

#### **Poverty Truth Pledge**

The Poverty Truth Pledge asks all service providers to take a person-centred approach and promote non-judgemental practice. It was created to promote the honest and respectful treatment of all people, encouraging the development of positive relationships rather than transactional processes. The aim was that by signing up, organisations and the people within them become more self-aware, and are accountable for their behaviour.

**I pledge to treat you how you want to be treated**

## **Hearing the voices of people experiencing poverty and acting to address the issues they raise - our fairer future objectives:**

1. Tackle stigma and change the conversation about poverty.
2. Hear the voices of lived and living experience and ensure they influence policy and decision making.
3. Empower Community Inspirers to share their stories and experiences.
4. Amplify the voices of communities.
5. Support a national movement for change in relation to the understanding and approach to poverty.

### **Key activities to support the advancement of these objectives include:**

#### **1 Tackle stigma and change the conversation about poverty**

We will develop a comprehensive and ongoing external communications campaign to raise levels of awareness and engagement with the issues relating to poverty and tackle stigma. This will use existing local media channels and the Fairer Future webspace and will acknowledge the role that poverty and low income, difficulty accessing high quality work and support play in a complex range of health and wellbeing issues.

We will use the stories and experiences of Community Inspirers as the basis for a cultural change programme and training offer across Council staff and Members, partners and the business community using tools such as 'How We Live' and the 'Poverty Truth Pledge'. We will seek to co-produce a Poverty Emergency pledge to share with other organisations to encourage a consistent social justice approach to tackling poverty.

#### **2. Hear the voices of lived and living experience and ensure they influence policy and decision making**

We will work closely with all services to ensure key policies, decisions and issues are shared with the poverty truth advisory board and community inspirers. A programme of in-depth reviews will be undertaken to identify key issues in relation to poverty and inequality. These will draw upon data, evidence, lived and living experience and professional expertise to identify local recommendation and co-produce solutions.

#### **3. Empower Community Inspirers to share their stories and experiences**

We will develop a model of excellence in how we support new and existing inspirers to play a full and pro-active role in bringing this strategy to life. We will do this by working closely with Community Inspirers to identify a pathway of support from their recruitment, development, and ongoing involvement with the poverty agenda. We will develop creative mechanisms for engagement and empowerment working closely with culture, arts, and heritage. Impactful case studies of how their role has influenced local action will be collated to celebrate their impact and achievements.

We will also seek to recruit further inspirers to ensure a range of perspectives continue to be heard. We are particularly keen to recruit inspirers from a diverse range of backgrounds, for example ensuring representation from younger age groups, black and ethnic minority communities, disabled people, and those from rural communities, to reflect local challenges

#### **4. Amplify the voices of communities**

We will work with Community Inspirers, Members, partner organisations and the voluntary and community sector to understand the needs of communities and amplify the voices of people living in poverty. We will refresh Council consultation standards to ensure that individuals experiencing poverty are engaged through any Council listening exercises. Historically, views from disadvantaged residents have seldom been heard and public perceptions of poverty do not always reflect the importance and complexity of the issue. At present people from low-income backgrounds are under-represented in positions of influence within every sector and sphere. We want to ensure that people from low incomes have a strong voice and are engaged in civic life.

#### **5 Support a national movement for change in relation to the understanding and approach to poverty**

Through webinars, and roundtable events we will act as a convener of other local authorities and organisations across the country to create a national movement to tackle poverty. We will fully utilise the Fairer Future webspace to showcase and share progress and good practice alongside the latest data on poverty and continue to work with the academic community to enhance our knowledge and understanding of the impact of poverty and potential solutions.

#### **Success factors**

We will be successful if we see

- Greater awareness of the Poverty Emergency.
- More people adopting the Poverty Truth Pledge.
- The development of a co-produced Poverty Emergency pledge.
- Lived and living experience used to inform a wider range of Council and partner policies and services.
- Fewer people experiencing shame and stigma due to poverty.
- Active engagement between a range of partners and the Poverty Truth Advisory Group.
- More people getting involved as community inspirers from a wide range of backgrounds.
- More people watching the 'How we live' film.
- More people completing refreshed poverty awareness training including challenging media narratives using evidence.
- Engage more individuals experiencing poverty through Council listening exercises.
- More community initiatives that take a social justice approach to tackling poverty and all of its effects, shaped by Community Inspirers, within every

low-income community and accessible to residents on low incomes within rural communities.

- More people in positions of leadership and influence across the Council and the borough are from low-income backgrounds.
- Community spaces available in low-income areas.

## **Pillar two Alleviation**

### **Urgent action to tackle the immediate consequences of poverty**

The immediate consequences of poverty need urgent and serious attention. Our approach will balance fair and accessible support services with building resilience for individuals and households to be able to manage their own decisions and make informed choices. Our promotion of support will reflect our social justice based, approach.

Throughout the winter of 2021 there has been a large increase in essential energy costs and rising inflation contributing to an increased cost of living. Cost increases, particularly for essentials such as food and energy, are difficult to manage for those on already stretched budgets. The pressures of meeting these essential costs can cause stress and anxiety and often involve making cuts in other areas which can affect overall wellbeing. We will continue to provide support to residents through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, and the Help in Emergencies for Local People (HELP) scheme which offers local welfare assistance including support for exceptional needs, emergency funding in a crisis or help for people moving out of care.

It is important that all local service and communities can play their part and we take concerted action across a broad range of areas. We must also maintain our focus on the smaller actions and initiatives which can make a big difference to individuals experiencing hardship and poverty. We will strive to adopt a person-centred approach to poverty alleviation rather than a single offer which might not suit all. As part of this strategy greater efforts will be made to join up initiatives and to learn from their impact through improved use of evidence. Our approach to promoting our investment in tackling poverty will be transparent and seek to establish which elements are statutory provision or existed prior to this strategy and which are new.

#### **Urgent action to tackle the immediate consequences of poverty, our fairer future objectives:**

1. Join up provision, improve signposting and raise awareness of support.
2. Tackle health inequalities across the life course.
3. Effectively target early years and family support.
4. Enhance actions to support young people into education, employment, and training.
5. Improve financial inclusion.
6. Tackle fuel poverty.
7. Tackle food poverty.
8. Increase digital inclusion.
9. Ensure there is affordable and secure housing for our residents.
10. Ensure access to high quality welfare advice and advocacy services.
11. Affordable and sustainable transport.
12. Support older people with low incomes.
13. Support disabled people and carers who are experiencing poverty.
14. Support single parents who are experiencing poverty.

15. Support younger people who are experiencing poverty.
16. Support minority ethnic people and those whose first language is not English who are experiencing poverty.
17. Tackling suicide and poverty.

**Key activities to support the advancement of these objectives include:**

**1. Joining up provision, signposting and raising awareness of support**

We will raise awareness of the support and services available to communities and utilise a variety of channels to make sure we can communicate with people in a way that is accessible. We will make sure that staff, Members, volunteers, and partners have access to up-to-date information and training and are empowered to support and signpost residents appropriately always treating them with respect and dignity.

We will make sure that support services are joined up with clear pathways for people to access services and navigate with good standards of customer services, this serves both to help residents as well as making the best use of the resources available. We will ensure the voices of lived and living experience are considered as part of the Welfare Services Review and used to influence future service design.

In the design and delivery of services we will utilise existing community assets such as community centres, children's centres, and libraries, adopting a one stop shop approach where possible. We will also take account of the specific needs of rural communities and make sure all parts of the borough have good access to services.

We will endeavour to capture data and evidence about the uptake and impact of services, publish our findings and progress on the Fairer Future webspace and identify the additional value added by this strategy.

**2. Tackle health inequalities across the life course**

We will work with partners to tackle health inequalities and support activity to become Marmot Community ensuring that the voice of lived and living experience is embedded within the local approach. We will also support the agenda by encourage uptake of key services from the most deprived communities relating to healthy lifestyles including targeted action to reduce smoking and alcohol use, substance misuse, harmful gambling and promote the take up of social prescribing.

We will support people who have low income to access free and low-cost wellbeing opportunities and make best use of Cheshire's natural health service to provide access to outdoor activities within the borough's green space assets.

In recognition of the role that addiction can play in helping people to cope with the stress of ongoing poverty, we will explore opportunities to ensure recovery is supplemented by support to maximise income that is accessible to all.

We will contribute to the development of the forthcoming Mental Health Strategy. We will champion equitable access to high quality mental health and wellbeing support for all communities and targeted approaches to bridging the mental health support gap for low-income young people and their parents. We will encourage the

development of community and peer led mental health and wellbeing interventions targeted at low-income communities.

We will work with health partners across Cheshire and Merseyside to raise awareness of the issue of limited NHS dentistry places and the disproportionate impacts that having to travel outside of the immediate neighbourhood for treatment has on those on low incomes and their children, including public transport barriers, cost barriers and the additional time commitments for those on insecure employment contracts of having to travel for treatment.

### **3. Effectively target early years and family support**

We will promote and encourage uptake of early years and family support through extended service provision from hubs for families and local communities. We will continue activity to narrow the attainment gap between children from low-income backgrounds and their peers, ensuring an evidence-based approach and identifying best practice. Supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities is also critical and we will link in with current support structures. We will also ensure children and young people from low-income households have equitable access to high quality services that support good mental health and wellbeing

### **4. Enhance actions to support young people into education, employment, and training**

We will support schools to work with employers to support workplace learning including the Cheshire and Warrington pledge. As an employer we will participate in programmes such as Kickstart to support young people into work and review processes to support younger apprenticeships through the Council, our partners, and our supply chain. We will work closely in partnership to ensure the most vulnerable children including those with special educational needs and disability, and care leavers have the opportunity to benefit from these programmes.

### **5. Improve financial inclusion**

We provide a wide range of support for residents suffering from financial hardship including the discretionary Help for Local People in Emergencies scheme, the Council Tax Reduction Scheme aimed at helping people who are on low incomes and short-term Discretionary Hardship Payments for residents with a shortfall between the amount residents receive in Council Tax reduction and how much they need to pay, or rent shortfalls. The Council has also adopted a vulnerability policy which sets out the approach to identifying and supporting vulnerable residents in the approach to debt collection and a commitment to signposting residents to additional help and support where appropriate. The Council is also working towards full adoption of the Money Advice Trust Stop the Knock initiative which laid out six steps to improve debt collection practices and ensure that those who are most vulnerable receive additional support to meet their Council Tax liability.

We will promote affordable and ethical access to financial services to avoid the need for payday loans and use of excessive credit agencies. We will publicise current access routes to debt advice and support and seek to monitor improvements or evidence of reduced reliance on unethical credit and problem debt within the borough and across the income spectrum.

## **6. Tackle fuel poverty**

We will deliver a comprehensive set of actions to tackle fuel poverty as part of our affordable warmth plan and our commitment to end fuel poverty within the borough by 2030. These include coordinating and targeted advice and guidance to residents so they can access support which will reduce their fuel bills. The green doctor scheme will be a key part of this advice offer. This includes home visits where small measures such as draught-proofing, radiator backing, LED lights and hot water tank jackets are also provided. We will deliver appropriate fuel poverty training to housing, health, and social care staff and seek to secure funding to deliver the plan including eco flex, green homes grant, social housing decarbonisation fund, and warm homes fund to improve the quality of social housing stock in partnership with social housing providers. We will also ensure that any additional hardship resources allocated by the government are deployed efficiently and effectively.

## **7. Tackle food poverty**

Food security is when an individual has enough money to make a decent meal and can readily access affordable healthy food in their community. Our aim is that food poverty becomes a thing of the past and we support the West Cheshire Food Partnership aspiration of a “future where nobody should have to rely on or use foodbanks to provide food for themselves or their family” acknowledging the importance of access to affordable food for people to thrive in their everyday lives. We recognise that food security is directly linked to health inequalities, and the ability to make a decent meal has have a positive link with health outcomes and overall wellbeing.

We will build on strengthened relationships with local organisations and umbrella groups such as the Welcome Network to meet needs and make lasting change. We will support foodbanks to be meeting places, providing a wider range of support such as cooking, activities for children, and debt advice in a dignified and friendly setting. We will continue to work towards Cheshire West becoming a ‘Sustainable Food Place’ which aims to ensure affordable food is accessible for all. We will work closely with the Food Partnership in the delivery of the Food Strategy.

## **8. Increase digital inclusion**

Digital inclusion is a social issue, a lack of digital skills and access can have a huge negative impact on a person’s life, leading to poorer health outcomes and a lower life expectancy, increased loneliness and social isolation, reduced access to jobs and education. It can mean paying more for essentials, financial exclusion, an increased risk of experiencing poverty. We will work through the digital inclusion partnership to take collective action against digital exclusion to provide community support, digital skills, and affordable access to devices.

We will also develop a single pathway for digital skills training and coordinated advice and guidance. Support a network of staff across the borough willing to be champions for digital inclusion and to refer residents into available support. We will pilot digital device loan scheme, delivered through libraries and other community venues, to support residents in need with their digital skills, access to services, and familiarity with technology. We will explore programmes to recycle Council devices and deploy them to residents in need and work collaboratively with social housing providers to develop schemes to provide connectivity to more residents. We will also

work to influence internet service providers and government bodies to tackle connectivity not-spots.

### **9. Ensure there is affordable and secure housing for our residents**

We will deliver the affordable housing programme and Council housing development programme to widen access to green, energy efficient high-quality homes that people on low incomes can afford. We will implement the West Cheshire Homes common allocation policy to ensure that social housing is allocated fairly and objectively to those in the greatest housing need. We will put the spotlight on the issue of overcrowding, damp and other health hazards faced by people living in sub-standard accommodation and seek to work with private sector landlords to raise standards.

Rough sleepers are one of the most vulnerable groups in society, many with high levels of complex and interrelated needs. To minimise rough sleeping, we will continue to deliver a Multi - Agency Rough Sleeping model bringing together a range of agencies to support those individuals living on the street and identifying pathways to accommodation. We will seek to develop a better understanding of the impact of homelessness and uprooting on families, women, and children to feed into service delivery.

### **10. Ensure access to high quality welfare advice and advocacy services**

We will ensure residents have access to high quality social welfare and advice services that respond to the needs of residents and prevent problems escalating. We will seek to make sure that services within the Borough are easy to access, joined up across agencies and offer a holistic and preventative approach. We will support a range of advocacy services that support residents to maintain their independence, challenge issues which may lead to social exclusion and exercise their individual rights.

### **11. Affordable and sustainable transport**

Access to affordable and sustainable transport is key to removing barriers that people face accessing jobs and key services, particularly for residents in more rural parts of the Borough. We will work to improve transport links to employment and training opportunities to key services and improve physical accessibility by removing barriers to mobility especially for disabled and older people. We will promote active travel across all communities, including more deprived areas, and identify opportunities for community led transport initiatives. We will seek investment to deliver the bus service improvement plan to make transport more accessible and affordable.

### **12. Support older people with low incomes**

We will establish the level of deep poverty amongst our older resident population and ensure older people are targeted to access support services including fuel poverty, income maximisation, welfare advice, food security, disability including learning disabilities and autism, combating loneliness and isolation and housing advice. We will explore the impact of age friendly communities and opportunities for wider adoption.

### **13. Support disabled people and carers who are experiencing poverty**

Disabled people often face extra disability-related costs, which are only partly compensated through benefits. Disabled people can also face barriers to employment and working disabled people are often paid less than their peers. Additionally, parents of children with disabilities, may struggle to find quality flexible work and affordable childcare. We will promote uptake of support such as disability-related financial support, including benefits, tax credits, payments, grants, access to work schemes and concessions. We will also seek to raise the voices of disabled people living in poverty and ensure they can influence policy and service design.

We will implement the carers strategy and action plan and encourage Cheshire West and Chester's employers to adopt carer friendly policies such as flexible hours and carer leave so individuals with carer responsibilities can balance work and caring responsibilities.

#### **14. Support single parents who are experiencing poverty**

We will seek to develop a fuller understanding of the main ways that poverty impacts on single parents and their children. We will also ascertain the likely extent to which deep poverty impacts women with children in comparison with other groups affected by poverty to help us better allocate and target support, including from across our partner networks.

#### **15. Support younger people who are experiencing poverty**

We will seek to develop a fuller understanding of the main ways that poverty impacts on young people including care leavers. We will report on our progress against baseline in relation to closing inequity of access between low-income children and young people and their more affluent peers in relation to all categories of special educational needs and disability and mental health support. We will seek a better understanding of the challenges experienced by young people and their families about their experiences of dealing with schools and other organisations whilst their child was in need of assessment and support and will publish the outcome. We will work more closely with schools, the youth service, and other stakeholders to tackle stigma, bullying, period poverty and encourage more young people to become young inspirers.

#### **16. Support ethnic minority groups and those whose first language is not English who are experiencing poverty**

We will develop a greater understanding of the poverty related issues and challenges facing ethnic minority communities, and those whose first language is not English. We will work closely with community sector organisations to ensure all services are accessible and can support a wide range of issues. We will work closely with partners that support refugees and asylum seekers to build a picture of the specific support needs of these communities and support awareness and signposting to poverty related services and wider support around wellbeing including displacement, trauma, and loneliness.

#### **17. Tackling suicide, and poverty**

National charity The Samaritans found that income and unmanageable debt, unemployment, poor housing conditions, and other socioeconomic factors all contribute to high suicide rates and recommend that tackling inequality should be central to suicide prevention, with support being targeted toward the poorest groups who are likely to need it most.

Living in poverty can have a profound impact on wellbeing, in particular triggering or worsening common mental disorders like anxiety and depression. We will explore potential of enhanced social prescribing activity linked to the poverty agenda.

We will continue to support the delivery of the Cheshire and Merseyside No More Suicide Strategy, through awareness raising, the provision of training, suicide bereavement support, mental health promotion, and supporting people with lived experience of suicide to become involved. The Council will work with partners to promote positive messages on mental wellbeing and suicide prevention that acknowledge the role of low income.

Our publicity around public health and health related behaviours will be aligned to the Marmot approach and take a sensitive, social model of health approach, recognising the role of poverty and related stress in diminishing choice and options. Health inequalities being driven by wider socio-economic unfairness, rather than a lifestyle choice or personal failing.

### **Success factors**

We will be successful if we see

- A clear borough wide offer of support that is well promoted and known by all partners.
- Higher resident satisfaction with Council services.
- Community Inspirers have meaningful influence in the development and design of key services, for example the Welfare Services Review.
- More residents supported at their first point of contact with the Council or partners.
- More staff and volunteers with the skills, resources, and confidence to signpost people to services at the earliest opportunity.
- Reduced health inequalities within the Borough.
- Greater take up of early years childcare entitlement, free school meals, and healthy start vouchers.
- More people becoming members of a credit union.
- Fewer people experiencing fuel poverty.
- The Borough becoming a 'gold' sustainable food place.
- Reduced numbers of people requiring emergency food support.
- More residents with the skills, confidence, and technology to get online.
- Fewer people requiring temporary accommodation.
- Fewer people rough sleeping.
- Fewer families with children living in overcrowded or unhealthy accommodation.
- More people accessing sustainable modes of transport.

- Fewer deaths by suicide.
- Fewer older people on low incomes experiencing isolation and loneliness.

## **Pillar three Root Cause**

### **Transforming how we do things to tackle the underlying causes of poverty**

**If we want to achieve our goal of reducing poverty to a maximum of 1 in 10 residents, then we need to go beyond dealing with the symptoms and address the root causes of poverty.**

In addition to our commitment to supporting people who are already struggling with poverty, we must look to prevent people from falling into poverty in the first place and make sure there are real pathways out of poverty. This will require a radical shift in how our economy, public services and society operates. Some of these changes are already happening to some extent but the challenge is to move with greater scale and pace.

The causes of poverty are wide-ranging, and many existing strategies and programmes of work are underway in the borough to reduce inequality. The Fairer Future strategy does not intend to duplicate any of the work that is already taking place but seeks to complement and support delivery.

As part of the implementation of this strategy we will seek out opportunities to collaborate with and influence the work of a wide range of partners, including the emerging NHS Integrated Care System and any potential for devolved sub regional working.

**Transforming how we do things to tackle the underlying causes of poverty, our fairer future objectives:**

1. Remove barriers to high quality employment.
2. Recognise the pressures and stigma affecting those on fixed incomes and tackle the poverty premium.
3. An inclusive economy that benefits everyone.
4. Improved social mobility.
5. Support community-based working.
6. Drive system change through collaboration and devolution.
7. Embed poverty considerations in all decision making.
8. Adopt rigorous evidence-based approaches.

Key activities to support the advancement of these objectives include:

#### **1. Remove barriers to high quality employment**

We will support delivery of targeted programmes such as Journey First and Individual Placement Support to support individuals with more complex needs into employment. Our network of Work Zones will have a key role to play to support people furthest from the labour market. We will utilise our employment and

procurement powers to support quality local employment through procurement, employment practices, adoption of the living wage and flexible working offer.

## **2. Recognise the pressures and stigma affecting those on fixed incomes and tackle the poverty premium**

We will implement recommendations to integrate Council services that tackle financial hardship and ensure a joined up, easy to understand service offer. We will evaluate the service offer to consider if sufficient support is in place to support with welfare advice for disabled residents.

## **3 An inclusive economy that benefits everyone**

The development of an Inclusive Economy Prospectus for Cheshire West and Chester sets out a framework for a fairer model of growth and we will support this area of work by showcasing innovation and successful practice from within the Borough and beyond particularly where those innovations have improved the income, status, terms and conditions and flexibility for low income workers.

We will engage further in the development of a social justice-based approach to community wealth building and co-operative models through closer work and collaboration with the Co-operative Council Innovation Network and Co Operatives UK.

We will continue to work closely in the development and implementation of the Inclusive Economy Prospectus and action plan. Key actions to include

- Development of skills escalators.
- Increasing green jobs and skills.
- Tackling digital inclusion.
- Raising youth aspiration.
- Delivering better places through targeted regeneration.
- Improving transport access.
- Supporting natural capital.
- Creating a long-term plan for housing retrofit.
- Promoting good employment.
- Establish an anchor framework.
- Strengthen social value procurement.
- Supporting new models of business including social enterprises.

The Poverty Emergency declaration referenced the key role that community wealth-building can play in stimulating the local economy and in enabling greater investment to be targeted within the communities that have been most affected by austerity and the pandemic. To build a successful and equitable approach, further targeted capacity building, community education and development support is required. This will enable those in the most disadvantaged communities to benefit.

Working with Anchor Institutions, our local organisations with a stake in the area, we aspire to address the following objectives over time:

- Work with anchor organisations, rooted in the borough, to collectively use our procurement and employment powers to support local supply chains, investment, and jobs
- Ensure that land is fully utilised for community benefit
- Support communities to have greater control of the use, management, and ownership of local assets
- Support cooperatives and employee ownership
- Undertake focussed community education and support work around worker-owned cooperatives to promote to low-income residents and those in low paid or insecure work.
- Active participation of communities in decision making
- Encourage local people to buy local, creating additional benefits for the area
- Using the investment powers of local institutions to support local investment that benefits communities where appropriate with a particular focus on those that have been most harmed and disadvantaged through the pandemic to level up locally.

### What are Anchor Institutions?

The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) defines anchor institutions as organisations which:

- Have an important presence in a place, usually through a combination of being largescale employers, the largest purchasers of goods and services in the locality, controlling large areas of land and/or having relatively fixed assets.
- Are tied to a particular place by their mission, histories, physical assets, and local relationships. Examples include local authorities, NHS trusts, universities, trade unions, large local businesses, the combined activities of the community and voluntary sector and housing associations.

#### 4. Improved social mobility

We will address educational and employment inequalities faced by young people and recognise that children and young people from low-income families don't remain poor as adults because of a lack of intelligence or willingness to try, but through a series of barriers, disadvantage, and unfairness, including within the education system. We will work in partnership to improve access to opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and vulnerable groups to reduce inequalities. We will develop a greater understanding of the youth social mobility challenge by engaging with young people with lived and living experience of poverty identify the barriers and the challenges they face.

#### 5. Supporting community-based working

Poverty in the borough is concentrated in certain geographies with pockets of rural poverty and disadvantage. Therefore, an approach that tailors interventions to meet the varied needs of communities is essential but importantly that supports community led working to build upon existing strengths and assets.

Through the delivery of this strategy, we will develop stronger relationships with the nine care communities which bring a range of organisations together to tailor our approach to enhancing wellbeing and good health at a local level. We will work closely with town and parish councils to identify how poverty and inequality can be tackled, particularly in rural communities. We will explore integrated approaches with housing associations to take a tailored approach to local neighbourhoods. We will encourage integrated, community led hub approaches around key local assets such as libraries, community centres, village halls and children centres.

We will make sure that poverty implications are considered within regeneration projects to ensure good access to services, green space and enhance community assets.

We will remain focussed on how poverty and inequality is tackled within our communities strongly aligned to the Poverty Emergency commitments and principles, as these acknowledge the impacts and insights of the pandemic and are firmly anchored in a social justice approach. Communities and community leaders will be essential in delivering long lasting change. We will undertake a programme of topic based deep dives into key actions to unlock transformational change.

We will encourage and promote a broad range of civic participation encouraging those from low-income backgrounds to get involved in civic life and making civic life, including positions of influence, more accessible to and appreciative of the perspectives and experience those from low-income backgrounds bring, thereby addressing gaps in and enriching our local democracy.

## **6. Driving system change through collaboration and devolution**

We are committed to working collaboratively with partners within and beyond the borough to share evidence and good practice about tackling poverty. Through the implementation of this strategy, we will build strong relationships within the borough and sub-region to ensure all activity considers the implications and opportunities for people in poverty, including the Local Enterprise Partnership and Integrated Care System.

We will consider the opportunities presented for enhanced devolution, more progressive allocation of resources to local areas such as removing ringfences and competitive bids for funding and devolved budgets to allow local prioritisation and greater local accountability for tackling the root causes of poverty.

## **7. Embed poverty considerations in all decision making**

We are committed to transparency as a Council in how we allocate resources and to ensuring that our policies and decisions don't make things worse for those on low incomes. Through activity to poverty proof all decisions made by the Council, we will also encourage partners across wider public services will also be encouraged to adopt this practice.

## **8. Adopt rigorous evidence-based approaches**

The importance of data and evidence runs throughout this strategy. A Fairer Future data and evidence report pulls together the key information and evidence that underpins this strategy. However, we know there are gaps in our knowledge, and this is an area we wish to develop over time. We will regularly report our progress in capturing this data and in any changes or progress evident through our monitoring via the Poverty Truth Assessment. Alongside the publication of poverty-related Council expenditure we will seek to build a picture of customer demand for services and support, statutory and non-statutory provision and expenditure and the impact of changes to funding and service access criteria on low-income communities, including the extent of any regressive impacts and alternatives considered.

## **Success factors**

We will be successful if we see

- More organisations signing up as Living Wage Employers.
- Broader adoption of fair employment practices.
- Increased number of worker-led cooperative organisations and other social enterprises.
- Established partnerships to explore how broader Community Wealth Building initiatives might be structured to benefit our lowest income communities.
- The adoption of a Fair Employment Charter, recognising excellence in relation to pay and benefits, employment contracts, work-life balance, job design and nature of work, relationships at work, employee voice and health and wellbeing.
- Increased social mobility of young people.
- The growth of a network of active, community led hubs providing a wide range of community advice and support including poverty and social justice themed hubs providing focussed discussion, support, and connection, for example to community education, tenant and employment rights awareness and welfare advice.
- A more diverse range of individuals becoming engaged within civic life, including people from low- income backgrounds.
- The growth of an active network of Councils collaborating, sharing good practice, and seeking to influence national change regarding poverty reduction.
- Voluntary adoption of the Socio-Economic Duty within Council and partner decision making.
- A robust approach to capturing, monitoring, analysing, and reporting information about the impact and effectiveness of Council services on all aspect of poverty and for all groups within the borough e.g.
  - Percentage fewer young people entering low paid work.
  - Percentage increased opportunities for young people from low-income backgrounds who are likely to enter low status and low paid work to learn about worker-owned co-ops and raise awareness of the support on offer from within the Council and from our partners.

- Percentage fewer women, people from low- income minority ethnic backgrounds and people with disabilities entering low paid work.
- Percentage increase in low-income women, people from low-income minority ethnic backgrounds and people with disabilities accessing opportunities to learn about worker-owned co-ops and receive support.
- Impact of changes to funding and changes in service access criteria on low-income communities reported, including the extent of any regressive impacts of funding decisions made by Council, reasons for those decisions and alternatives considered.

# Making It Happen

## Accountability

**Cabinet:** The Leader of the Council and Cabinet is ultimately accountable for the delivery of this strategy, supported by the Leader's Champion for Poverty and Inequality and the Poverty Truth Advisory Board. Partners are also engaged at an executive level through the Health and Wellbeing Board.

**Poverty Truth Advisory Board:** Following the Poverty Emergency declaration, a Poverty Truth Advisory Board has been established with public, private, and civic sector representatives, as well as Community Inspirers to advise and support on the poverty agenda. The Board provides insight and support from a lived experience perspective on the development of other key policy initiatives, and reports and makes recommendations to key decision-making bodies, including the Council's Cabinet and multi-agency Health and Wellbeing Board. The Board is co-chaired by the Leader's Champion and a Community Inspirer and has a minimum of 50 per cent of its membership occupied by those from low-income backgrounds who participate as 'experts by experience'.

We will continue to engage with Community Inspirers and ensure they are able to shape the work of the Poverty Truth Advisory Board. The structure, membership and role of the Board is expected to evolve to meet the challenges of ensuring the delivery in full, monitoring and refreshing of this strategy and action plan.

**Resources:** A small officer team is in place responsible for supporting the poverty function including:

- Development, co-ordinating implementation and monitoring of this strategy and action plan.
- Research on best practice.
- Data analysis relating to poverty and inequality.
- Overseeing the delivery of training related to the poverty agenda.
- Supporting community inspirers.
- Ensuring inspirers can share their views on local decisions and key issues.
- Supporting the governance of the strategy.
- Liaison with partners to join up key anti-poverty initiatives.
- Developing local public awareness.
- Engagement with national organisations and government.

**Reporting progress:** A progress update will be reported regularly to the Poverty Truth Advisory Board and Cabinet. This will include progress against key measure and actions and provide an opportunity to celebrate achievements, to highlight any revisions needed to the strategy, or structure supporting delivery to reflect the latest circumstances.

# Appendix - Poverty Emergency Declaration

The people and planet approach to recovery and renewal as described within the Poverty Emergency declaration is central to this strategy.

## The Declaration

- i. **Prioritising people and planet** - Identifying where the environmental and poverty agendas overlap to tackle common issues of inequality, health, and wellbeing.
- ii. **Recognising socio-economic deprivation as an equalities issue** - Acknowledging that the stress of being poor and in crisis has a detrimental impact on health, including mental health and wellbeing, achievement, life chances, participation, resilience, and social cohesion.
- iii. **Investing in 'levelling up' locally** - Working with residents to understand the barriers to employment, housing, health, leisure, or education, and investing locally to level up our Borough's communities.
- iv. **Embedding lived experience** - Building on the foundations of the Poverty Truth Commissions, to reach out to people affected by poverty and use their experience to develop better policies and services which respond to their needs.
- v. **Building stronger communities** - Continuing to work with the network of groups involved in the community Covid response and other local initiatives, to increase participation in local democracy and involve people in the decisions that affect their lives. Providing a means for new groups to meet and build confidence, to collaborate, educate, experience a sense of ownership and influence and to build democratic participation, to root necessary responses within the heart of low-income communities.
- vi. **Unlocking community wealth and potential** - Developing further Council strategies around community wealth building, including supporting communities to consider routes to community ownership to create jobs and share local wealth. Fostering the education, awareness, skills, and culture-shift at all levels that provide the precursor to meaningfully explore and expand community ownership as a route out of poverty and forward through the crisis.
- vii. **Working together** - Growing a network of local academics, professionals, unions, those with expertise in supporting migrants and asylum seekers and with existing and emerging poverty-related grassroots community groups and a wider network of people with lived-experience to support our work.
- viii. **Expanding our evidence-base** - Collating more detailed poverty-related data to better inform the local and national approach.
- ix. **Starting with ourselves** - Ensuring that our staff and those within our Council companies are paid at least a local living wage will make us an example to others, helping to expand our local living wage borough status. Through this and the implementation of our social value policy we can create inclusive growth in our borough, in partnership with our suppliers, contractors and commissioned services.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

1. Formally acknowledge the rising levels of poverty so widely evidenced over the past decade and further exacerbated by the dual crises of pandemic and recession.
2. Identify, report on and address unfair socio-economic barriers to democratic participation, security and wellbeing wherever they exist.
3. Ensure that the Poverty Emergency workstream sits alongside all other workstreams within the Council's recovery planning.
4. Develop a Poverty Emergency strategy which takes a people and planet approach to helping residents in our borough cope which aims to remedy the disproportionate social and economic impacts of the pandemic and recession.
5. Continue to streamline and widely publicise access routes to advocacy and support for those directly impacted by the crisis and facing homelessness and unemployment/underemployment
6. Work collaboratively with partners to provide space for community-led 'hubs' where solutions to low income and crisis impacts can be explored by local residents and support provided
7. Keep the disproportionate impacts of the crisis on low-income communities at the forefront of our response to planning, housing, land allocation and development including our response to recent legislative changes
8. Develop a dedicated online space for sharing of good practice, networking with other councils, and providing a platform for the Leader's Champion and an interface for collaboration with those directly impacted
9. Support the Leader's Champion for Poverty and Inequality to lead on this work, assisted by the cross-party Poverty Truth Advisory Board (PTAB) and a wide network of residents with lived experience.
10. Take a collaborative and evidence-based approach, working more closely with health, universities, trade unions and poverty-related community groups to improve our research and intelligence
11. Use what we learn through the work of the Poverty Emergency to raise the voices of those affected by poverty to help inform the government to shape and deliver their 'Levelling Up' agenda in our borough and sub-region.
12. Invite other councils to join with us in declaring a Poverty Emergency as a vehicle for systemic change in our society.
13. To share through networks like the LGA, our model for declaring a Poverty Emergency alongside a Climate Emergency as best practice in recovery and renewal.