

Tackling the Poverty Agenda

Strategic Approach

For some time now the Authority has worked alongside our partners with a focus on “promoting achievement and tackling disadvantage”. This has been evident through key strategies in place which focus on protecting the vulnerable, reducing inequalities and targeting those most in need in other words supporting those affected by poverty.

This remains our strategy and is strengthened by the need arising from the impact of the downturn in the economy, continued austerity measures and the introduction of legislative changes such as the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

The need to focus our resources more effectively and to support those most in need is set out in many of our approved strategies and is supported by the Medium Term Financial Plan:

- The Council Plan
- The Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- A Brighter Borough for All – Tackling Family Poverty
- Early Help Strategy (currently being developed)
- Carers Strategy
- City Deal and Statement of Ambition
- Housing Strategy
- Sport and Active Leisure Strategy.
- Access to Services Strategy
- Affordable Warmth Strategy
- Community Safety Plan

These Strategies identify through policy statements, priorities and key actions our focus on supporting those most in need and protecting the vulnerable. Examples of these priorities are detailed below:

- Supporting economic recovery
- Provision of Affordable Housing
- Making available a range of affordable events, leisure activities and decent public open spaces for leisure and sporting activity.
- A safer borough
- Protecting the vulnerable
- Safeguarding vulnerable adults and children
- Prevention and Early Help
- Improving Health and Wellbeing
- Protecting frontline services wherever possible
- Targeting resources and services
- Promoting channel shift
- Exploring alternative models of service delivery

- Working in partnership to maximise support and resources
- Supporting the development of a sustainable voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

Council Plan

- Effective prevention and early intervention
- Improve targeted early intervention services
- Narrow the attainment gap
- Improve outcomes for children and young people in care
- Ensure effective multi-agency safeguarding of our most vulnerable children and young people
- Support for families with a child or young person with a disability
- Reduce the impact of poverty on family life

Health and wellbeing Strategy

- Develop comprehensive early support for families.
- Enhance the offer of good quality early years education and childcare.
- Improve the educational outcomes for children and young people.
- Support every resident to access the range of benefits that they are entitled to.
- Lobby to establish a minimum income for healthy living for people of all ages.

Recent changes to the structures and focus of The Stockton Local Strategic Partnership is targeted specifically at tackling the poverty agenda. These changes create a real opportunity to focus specifically on Poverty and target resources and activity to support those most affected.

The Stockton Local Strategic Partnership has adopted as its key focus the Brighter Borough for All - Tackling Family Poverty document, which has two key aims.

- **Ensuring every child receives the best start in life**
- **Maximising family income.**

Work is to commence in the autumn with the locality forums to provide a better understanding of poverty at locality forum geographies and work with partners to make a real difference in the locality for those most affected by poverty.

On a more practical note these priorities and objective translate into some practical day to day activities such as:

- Our Procurement Strategy supports local employment opportunities including promotion of apprenticeships
- The council and partners such as housing providers and voluntary sector organisations are providing support for those looking for employment.
- A policy of 15% Affordable Housing has been approved which will ensure that 15% of all new housing developments will provide houses at affordable prices, supporting those most in need, to afford to live within the borough in houses which are both decent and affordable.
- The Discretionary Housing Payment Policy was approved on 11 April 2011. In 2012/13 the budget allocation was £167, 269 and covered 451 payments. In 2013/14 the budget allocation increased to £395,220
- Initial and further funding has been allocated to continue to rollout the CESP Scheme, delivering improved housing and fuel reduction costs now and into the future.
- A community energy switching scheme has been approved and supported by the Authority delivering reduced energy costs. The scheme has been rolled out to a further phase and includes a variety of payment options, those on payment meters and has been extended to include VCS organisations.
- Troubled Families Initiative.
- Work with young offenders.
- Minimising drug and alcohol misuse
- Early intervention through our Children's Centre offer
- Development of our Early Help strategy.
- Health promotion initiatives such as breastfeeding, tackling obesity, healthy eating initiatives
- Advice and support is being provided through the Housing Options Team to support those homeowners at risk of losing their homes. The service provides advice and information alongside representation/support with court proceedings.
- "Back on track", The Social Fund and Crisis loan scheme is being monitored closely to ensure this fund is being accessed and used appropriately. A triage approach is taken with both successful and unsuccessful applicants being signposted to other services and support as appropriate. This has included signposting to Job Centre Plus/DWP, Tees Credit Union, Stockton District and Advice Service and other advice agencies, local food banks and furniture recycling schemes.
- Welfare Rights are providing support, advice, guidance/ representation to those impacted specifically by the introduction of Personal Independent Payments they are also working with Client Financial Services, targeting service users that were receiving a social service but not claiming PIP, thus maximising income.
- The authority is working with schools and Child Poverty Action North East to reduce social inequality and "Poverty Proof" the school day.

This work is linked to maximising the pupil premium linked to free school meal provision. All aspects of this programme support those children most vulnerable and in need.

- A comprehensive events programme continues to be rollout out with many events/ activities being free of charge. Many activities linked to SIRF were provided free of charge.
- Free access and taster sessions have been run throughout the summer holidays at Tees Active outlets.
- The SWAN (Stockton Welfare Advice Network) partnership was awarded external funding of £196,229 over the two year period. The project funding covers the period September 2013 to end August 2015. SBC have been asked to be part of a steering group to oversee the development of the partnership and are also asked as part of the condition of the Big Lottery funding to formally sign up to supporting the partnership.
- The authority is working as part of a wider “Change Team” to support the Tees Credit Union to enhance its sustainability, develop its capacity and modernise its systems. The Stockton VCS investment fund has contributed to a temporary development officer post and a partnership arrangement with Darlington Credit Union to deliver the new Business Plan for Tees Credit Union. Additional funding is being sought via Northern Rock Foundation.

There is much activity underway, however there is always more to do. The targeted work of the new Locality Forums gives a real opportunity to make a difference and add momentum to work already being undertaken as a result of our overall strategic approach detailed in many of our key strategy documents.