



A FAIRER STOCKTON-ON-TEES

A strategic framework for tackling inequalities

2021-31

Contents

Page

Foreword

Introduction and definitions

What are we trying to achieve?

Causes

Our strategic approach

Our strategic framework

Delivering the Strategy

Engagement plans

Foreword

From the Leader of the Council

I am delighted to introduce fairer Stockton-on-Tees, the strategic framework for tackling inequalities in the Borough.

This is an ambitious collective call to action, and sets out an approach for the next 10 years. The impact of inequalities is a significant one across the country and our borough. It impacts on quality of life, life chances, and life expectancy.

Some members of our community start less well, have more difficult lives and die earlier than others purely because of where they live, or the circumstances into which they are born.

Tackling inequalities has long been a key priority for this Council. What this strategy does, for the first time, is map out a clear plan for action to do all we can to reduce unfair differences. It will not be easy, and that is why we have set out a ten year commitment. It will also require the involvement of a wide range of partners across the Borough including a key role for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

It will also require additional investment, and we believe the framework can help us to focus on a range of ways we can align existing spend, and take advantage of funding opportunities which may become available from Government and other sources. This is especially important in the context of COVID-19 recovery.

This document is a consultation draft on a strategic framework. It outlines our analysis, our assessment of available evidence, and sets out a series of proposals for action to reduce the gaps in our society. We are publishing this as part of our role as the key 'place shaper' for the Borough, and to fulfil a commitment in our Council Plan.

We can do something about this and we are determined to. We look forward to working with you to turn this framework into action.

Cllr Bob Cook

Introduction and definitions

Defining inequality

There are many different definitions of inequalities...but in essence inequalities can be summarized as: **'avoidable and unfair differences in status between groups of people or communities'**

The concept is most often applied to thinking around:

- income and living standards, and the link to poverty (and often, to child poverty, which is measured by income)
- health outcomes, with an emphasis on life expectancy – and the differences in this which can be seen across geography and between different communities. Of considerable interest at the current time is the inequality associated with the impact of COVID-19, not just on incidence, illness and death but on take up of vaccination
- the specific 'disadvantage' faced by some communities e.g. young, old, BAME communities who face specific challenges
- Housing choice and quality, and the lack of choice facing some communities and in some areas
- Place: it should not matter where you live

Our starting point

The Council Plan sets out our ambition:

Fighting inequality

Inequality is a challenge in the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees. We have affluent areas alongside areas of deprivation. Nine of our wards are in the 10% most deprived wards in the country and there is a gap of 21 years in average life expectancy amongst men between the most and least deprived wards. We're committed to fighting this discrepancy and making sure more people enjoy a healthy and happy life here.

We will:

Develop a new approach to tackling inequality in the Borough and to ensure that we deliver targeted support and help to those currently living in poverty to improve their outcomes, including around health inequalities and emotional health and wellbeing

The evidence tells us that, as the issues are complex, so our approach should be similarly multi-dimensional. We need to work at preventing and mitigating inequalities simultaneously. As an organisation and provider of services, we need to direct efforts across policy, strategy, service design and operational practice (attitudes as well as skill) in addition to implementing interventions which promote equality in life opportunities.

Our strategy has adopted the following key set of principles to support our work:

- That differences are unfair;
- That they are measurable;
- That we do not have to accept them and we can do something about it

Our strategic framework is also underpinned by the following:

- Although we accept that the causes of inequality have a nation and indeed global dimension, we can take concerted action locally to tackle the fundamental causes, reduce the impact and protect the most vulnerable;
- Although this strategy will require additional investment to achieve its ambitious outcomes, there is much good work already underway across the Borough which we can align to these objectives. What is required is focus, commitment and sustained emphasis;
- That whilst a key focus for us is on closing outcome gaps for disadvantaged communities and deprived areas with the rest of the Borough, we also must focus on closing the gaps between the Borough and the country;
- That is why our strategy is based around action everywhere across the Borough, with more intensive action where is most needed.

What are we trying to achieve?

Our aim is to reduce inequalities across the Borough, closing the gap in outcomes. Our focus is on three inter-related and connected outcomes frameworks

Borough wide outcomes framework

These measures set out the key areas where we want to make a difference for the Borough as a whole. This is based on the 3 fundamental causes and the six key environmental factors. An initial framework is set out below. We want to develop this further.

Domain	Measures
Income	% below 60% of median income
Wealth	% with savings or assets Levels of debt
Power	% who feel they have control over their lives
Work	% in work % in 'good jobs': pay, stability; progression
Learning	Educational attainment gaps % take up of early years entitlement Highest skill levels
Housing and physical environment	% in decent housing Private rented sector standards? Energy efficiency Access to open space
Social and cultural networks	% feel engaged in their community
Health	Life expectancy gaps Years of healthy living
Access to services	Customer experience and use data

In addition....**for disadvantaged communities**, we will use the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment analysis as the basis for determining key measures of success again linked to the framework above

In addition...**for deprived areas** we will identify key activities and interventions designed for each area based on the framework above.

Causes

Our analysis has drawn on available evidence and research which suggests that the fundamental causes of inequalities stem from uneven distributions of income, wealth and power. These are in term made worse by a number of key environmental factors

Although action to address the wider environmental causes and influences, such as the availability of 'good' work, housing, education, social networks and access to services and action to mitigate negative individual experiences, risks and lifestyles are important, they alone will not solve the problem. Going 'upstream' to tackle the fundamental causes of inequalities such as lack of power and money also needs to be part of our strategy.

Causes: uneven distribution of...	Exacerbated by variations in environmental factors...	Creating negative individual experiences...	Leading to poorer outcomes, such as...
→	→	→	→
<p>Income from work and other sources – an ability to afford essentials and more</p> <p>Wealth and resources – an ability to build up resources to generate further; have a stake</p> <p>Power and control – not having enough say in key life events; reliance on others, sense of powerlessness</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Leading to...</p> <p>Marginalisation, exclusion and injustice</p>	<p>Work</p> <p>Education and learning</p> <p>Housing and physical environment</p> <p>Social and cultural experiences</p> <p>Safe, stable, consistent family life</p> <p>Access to services and support</p>	<p>Unstable, low paid work</p> <p>Cognitive delay, undiagnosed needs</p> <p>Poor quality housing, overcrowding, lack of open space</p> <p>Exclusion from cultural activity, sport, leisure</p> <p>Inflexible services – not listening or personalised</p> <p>Increased marginalisation, isolation, despair</p> <p>Family breakdown</p> <p>Personal experience of neglect / abuse / trauma</p>	<p>Increased morbidity (illness)</p> <p>Mortality</p> <p>Obesity</p> <p>Aggression, violence and abuse</p> <p>Substance misuse</p> <p>Behavioural issues</p> <p>Crime / ASB / disruption</p> <p>Inability to trust, or form safe relationships</p> <p>Risk taking behaviour</p> <p>Vulnerable to exploitation</p> <p>Lack of empathy for others</p>

Our strategic approach

In defining our overall strategic approach, we have taken the following into account.

In terms of scale, we need to operate in a range of ways to make a difference: we need to be affective at the level of the individual, for specific communities and for the Borough as a whole;

In terms of focus, we need to take action in three main ways:

- **Undoing** some of the consequences of the fundamental causes of inequality: the unequal distribution of income, wealth and power.
- **Preventing** some of the more harmful environmental causes and influences which combine to prevent some communities taking advantage of the support and resources available.
- **Mitigating** the negative impact which individuals experience as a result of the fundamental causes and environmental conditions.

We recognise that we also need to adopt the basic principle of: action everywhere, more targeted action where the gaps are widest.

We propose an approach which also recognises that it will not be enough to either just focus on geography or the needs of specific 'communities of interest' but which must do both.

We also propose that there is a specific set of actions for the Council as a key employer, commissioner and provider of services, building on what we already do in this area, such as around the recruitment of apprentices and on local social value and giving this a sharper focus on inequalities.

The commitment recognizes that there will need to be additional investment, but also that much can be achieved by the alignment of existing resources, focusing our efforts to deliver this framework consistently, and with purpose over a long term timescale.

Our strategic framework

We propose an approach which is based on five key areas of focus:

1. Tackling fundamental issues across the borough as a whole;
2. A focus on reducing the inequalities faced by identified disadvantaged communities;
3. A focus on deprived neighbourhoods;
4. A focus on the most marginalised;
5. An emphasis on the Council as a major employer, commissioner and purchaser

Tackling fundamental issues across the borough as a whole

Although there are many international and national factors involved in this element which are beyond the remit of this strategy, it is proposed that there is a focus on a set of key objectives focusing on a borough wide approach to raising incomes; creating wealth; and developing a proactive approach to empowering individuals to have more control over the lives and the decisions that impact on them.

This approach is borough wide, builds on a range of exiting initiatives and strategies and seeks to combine them into a focused approach which will target the fundamental issues. It is anticipated that this will include a focus on the following:

- Income maximisation through benefit take up and opportunities for good work. This element will be focused on the strategic implementation of the Employment and Skills Hub as the key 'delivery vehicle' for a range of interventions.
- Poverty reduction through a specific focus on child poverty. This strand will be addressed through the Children and Young People Select Committee's work on child poverty in 2021
- A renewed emphasis on the best start for children and a specific focus on speech, language and communication issues
- Debt management and credit schemes, which tackle the issues faced by those most impacted by lack of credit, debt and economic exclusion
- Local supply chain development to support local enterprise
- Local co-production, engagement and decision making
- Local control over assets, building on previous experiences through asset transfer to progressively shift the opportunities for local communities to own, control and maximise the potential of community assets

A focus on reducing the inequalities faced by identified disadvantaged communities

We will take a coherent and focused approach to closing outcome gaps for the most disadvantaged communities.

Disadvantaged communities are recognised as geographies and communities of identity. There is strong interplay between environmental and socio-economic factors which can be

both a cause and an effect of inequality. Societal systems, structures and cultural perceptions can create disadvantage for communities of identity. *The Equality Act (2010)* legislates protection against discrimination of communities with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation). However, due to the multi-faceted nature of inequality, this alone does not guard against the compounding factors which lead to inequality in life chances and health outcomes.

This element will draw on the work in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, which has identified priorities for each group and the basis of effective responses.

Clearly level of need will vary within a defined population, however the risk of compounding disadvantage, inequality and inequity are highest within the named vulnerable groups. For example, there is a strong correlation between children in need, substance misuse, poor mental health, and offending.

Sex Working is not identified explicitly within the JSNA. However, it is known that there is an active population within the borough: behind closed doors, street working and virtual. It is therefore suggested that our understanding of, and response to, the needs of this group should be prioritised.

This element will identify, work with, profile and develop detailed approaches to work with a number of specific communities:

1. *Acute need*
 - a. *Those who are homeless or fleeing domestic abuse;*
 - b. *Those who misuse substances;*
2. *Learning difficulty or disability*
 - a. *Those with learning disabilities*
 - b. *physical disabilities*
 - c. *mental health difficulties*
 - d. *sensory impairment*
3. *Additional vulnerabilities*
 - a. *Refugees and asylum seekers;*
 - b. *BME communities;*
 - c. *English is an additional language;*
 - d. *In receipt of adult social care support*
4. *Families in need*
 - a. *Families living in poverty*
 - b. *Children in need (CIN or child protection)*
 - c. *Families with a young carer*

And will focus on six key 'gaps'

- good and stable jobs
- learning and skills development
- housing and physical environment
- family, social and cultural networks
- health outcomes
- access to services.

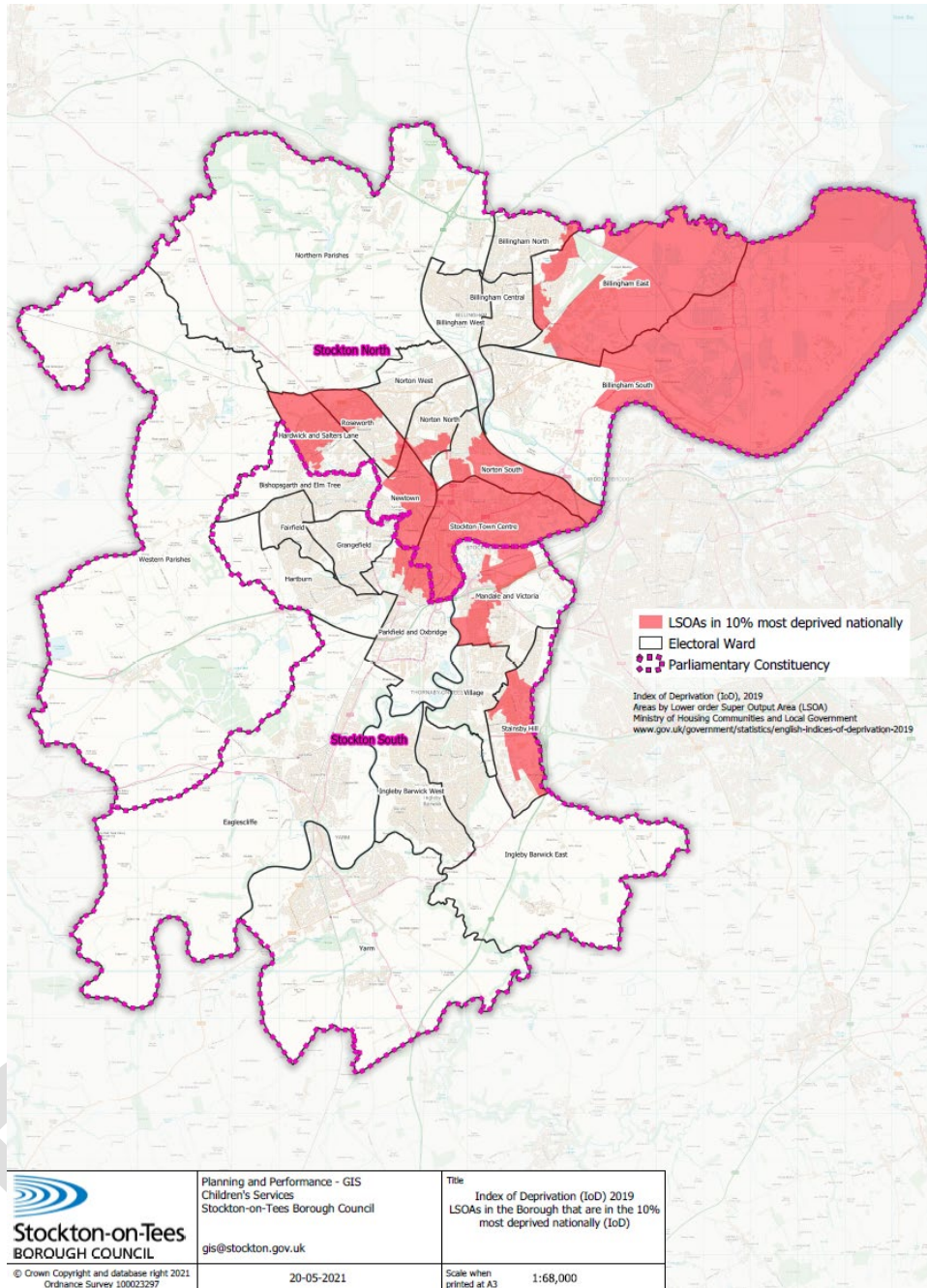
A focus on deprived neighbourhoods

We will also identify and focus on a number of targeted, deprived neighbourhoods where even more concerted efforts are needed to close key outcome gaps.

We will identify and target neighbourhoods initially through a focus on the IMD, but will work with local communities to identify natural communities, and to develop a local area analysis based on other sources of data, including Experian Mosaic, as well as primary ethnographic and experience based research, to develop local action plans.

We will take into account existing targeted area work and partnerships.

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We will again focus on the six key environmental factors which combine to widen inequalities.

- good and stable jobs
- learning and skills development
- housing and physical environment
- family, social and cultural networks
- health outcomes
- access to services.

A focus on the most marginalized

Our strategy will also seek to identify and work with a small number of individuals and families who may require different approaches to the delivery of support and services. This work will also focus on the impact of lived experiences, abuse and trauma, which lies at the heart of exclusion and marginalization for many individuals.

These will be families and individuals with complex lives and this work will focus on the personalization and intensity of support and challenge, working restoratively, targeting 'high-risk' individuals and providing very personalized and intensive support to those who need the most help.

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An emphasis on the Council as a major employer, commissioner and purchaser

We will also develop the role of the Council as an organisation with a focus on how the Council's employment, commissioning and procurement responses can support the development of a Fairer Stockton-on-Tees.

The key areas where we will focus are:

- Policy and strategy alignment to ensure all strategies include an inequalities 'lens
- Impact assessment – assessing the impact of decision making on inequalities and embedding this into the Council's decision making process.
- Service design principles to support the priorities in this framework – tools and examples to support implementation of tackling inequalities in all future service design work
- Practice – the development of practice frameworks which emphasis personalized support
- Procurement, purchasing – using our collective power in the market to support the framework: local purchasing
- Workforce – effective local recruitment and employment policies, employee benefits and support

Our analysis suggests that much of this framework is in place, but does not currently help to inform a concerted focus on reducing inequalities. Our emphasis in year 1 will therefore be to align current work.

Indicative action plan for the period October 2021 – March 2023

Key action area	Proposed action	By March 2022	By October 2022	By March 2023
Fundamental	<i>Implement key proposals to tackle fundamental causes</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employment hub 2. Pathways to work 3. Benefit take up 4. Access to credit 5. Food and fuel poverty 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Child poverty strategy 2. Early years strategy 3. Local supply chain action plan 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Minimum income guarantee 2. Local 'share' scheme 3.
Disadvantaged Groups	<i>Work with key community leaders Audit and review needs and gaps Develop and implement specific actions</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define and develop plans to close gaps 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and implement plans 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review
Deprived Places	<i>Identify, develop and implement areas based change plans to close outcome gaps</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Define areas – using IMD and local data 3. Establish local governance 4. Identify funding and capacity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Develop and implement change plans 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement and review 2. Local asset transfer / ownership
Most vulnerable / complex	<i>Identify and review models of delivery to most complex</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Review models and data 6. Identify cohort 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Review current contracting 4. Agree development model 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Implement and review
SBC	<i>Develop organization based tools and approach</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Staff training 8. Develop policy 9. Adopt impact tool 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Employment plan 6. Commissioning for social value plan 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4.

Engagement plan

Informal engagement

Informal engagement on the principles and approach commenced in June 2021 and will continue. This element consist of a series of presentations and discussions at established fora and meetings.

A stakeholder engagement has been developed, together with a slide pack to ensure consistent messaging to a variety of forums.

July – October

Following consideration by Cabinet in July 2021, further engagement will be undertaken with key partners, and with communities.

Post October 2021

The steering group will oversee further implementation. At this stage it is envisaged that the following will be in place:

- Local engagement and empowerment programmes in deprived areas;
- Engagement with for a representing disadvantaged communities;
- An ongoing programme of research, case study development and testing

Delivering the Strategy

Governance and accountability

- Cabinet will provide overall accountability and oversight to the delivery of the strategy. Updates will be provided at least 6 monthly.
- A Multi-Agency Steering Group will be established to oversee the implementation of the strategy
- Each of the targeted local areas will have a community led implementation group to oversee the development and delivery of the deprived areas element of the strategy

Resources

- The strategy will aim to align, focus and secure visible benefit from existing funding across the multi-agency partnership and steering group.
- However, it is anticipated that additional funding will be required to support delivery and implementation as this framework is implemented. There may be opportunities to access external funding for specific programmes.
- Coordination Team
 - A small coordination team will be required to coordinate delivery, and to support local action in deprived communities.
- Investment plan
 - Additional revenue funding will be required to support the design, development and delivery of additional actions to support the delivery of the strategy.
 - Additional capital investment will be required to support activity in targeted delivered areas. This would require access to additional external sources of capital funding, should there be a plan to reconfigure some communities and implement significant physical change.