

Stockton-on-Tees Child Poverty Update Report 2025-2026

1.0 Introduction

1.1 In the borough of Stockton-on-Tees, child poverty figures indicate that 20.9% of children are living in poverty, which is higher than the national average of 17%. Additionally, 45.9% of children from Stockton Town Centre are living in poverty, compared to 2% of children from the Northern Parishes.¹

1.2 Powering our Futures has a strong commitment outlined within the programme's design principles of reducing inequality and prioritising prevention whilst working with communities to put them at the heart of what we do, enabling them to thrive and support each other. The driver behind this work is to ensure our most vulnerable residents (our children) are supported to have 'The best start in life'.

1.3 Addressing and tackling child poverty forms part of the Council's commitment to reducing poverty and inequality through the A [Fairer Stockton-on-Tees Strategic Framework](#) and the [Anti-Poverty Strategy 2024-2027](#). Reducing child poverty levels also aligns with the priorities outlined in the [Stockton-on Tees Plan](#), namely 'The best start in life to achieve big ambitions' and 'Healthy and resilient communities'.

1.4 The Stockton-on-Tees Child Poverty Network continues to meet quarterly, bringing together Council staff and external partners to discuss the key issues children and families living in poverty are experiencing across our Borough. This is a collaborative group which also works to find solutions to these issues and improve the lives of our young people. A member of the Fairer Stockton-on-Tees team also represents SBC at the North East Child Poverty Commission and sits on the Commission's Executive Group.

1.5 This report outlines the progress made by the Council and its partners in 2025 to alleviate child poverty across the Borough. Reflecting on the recent publication of the Government's national child poverty strategy, '[Our Children, Our Future: Tackling Child Poverty](#)', the report also identifies some of the Council's key responses.

2.0 Key Achievements 2025

The following examples highlight the range of activity across the Council and with partners in 2025. Further information is provided in Appendix 1.

2.1 **Family Action Supporting Families Fund:** In April, through support provided by the FSOT team, Stockton Family Action and Outreach Service received £2000 from the Banks Group to provide to children and families who are engaging with their services which has made a made a meaningful difference to children and families providing essential items, reduce financial pressure on households, and create opportunities for positive family activities.

2.2 **Kit Out Campaign:** Sports clothing and equipment were provided to 40 families (identified by local schools) for free to encourage them to get active together.

2.3 **Here to Help Summer Family Fun Day Event:** In July, around 750 residents attended the second Summer Family Fun Day. Over 200 new and around 750 preloved uniform items

¹ Key Economic Statistics, *Stockton-on-Tees Council Plan 2024*.

were collected and distributed. 200 new and 300 preloved books, 100 filled back to school backpacks and around 1000 hygiene products and accessories were also distributed.

2.4 School Uniform Support: Pre-loved school uniform is now available to collect from any of the 4 Family Hubs. This provides a year-round offer that families and professionals can access when needed.

2.5 Back to School Campaign: During Summer 2025, the Council worked in partnership with the Junction Multibank to provide 600 backpacks to children and families across the Borough. The backpacks ranged in design so that they could not be identified as 'free backpacks' and to avoid stigma.

2.6 Free School Meals Auto-Enrolment Project: This cross-directorate project, resulted in almost 400 pupils being auto-enrolled for free school meals in 2025, with an increase in almost £500,000 in pupil premium for schools across the Borough.

2.7 Holidays Are Fun (HAF) Activity Programme: 14,166 free HAF sessions were booked and 10,286 were attended. Over 1600 unique children engaged with the programme, more than 1100 of which were free school meal eligible.

2.8 A Second Dance Prom Project: In May 2025, Council staff partnered with Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF), Wellington Square, Catalyst, and Additional Lengths salon to host a preloved prom event. 160 outfits were donated (plus shoes and bags) and 32 two young people left with dresses and suits for their proms, easing financial pressure for families.

2.9 Early Intervention and Prevention – North Thornaby: As part of targeted early intervention and prevention projects in North Thornaby, and following resident feedback, two new sessions have been recently launched at the Victoria Community Hall by the CE team aimed at families with toddlers.

2.10 Stockton Rotary Club Winter Coat Collection: Council staff supported the Stockton Rotary Club to introduce their first 'Wrap Up' campaign by liaising with Tees Active to set up collection points and then arranged distribution of the 724 (300+ for children and young people) winter coats, fleeces and scarves via Council services and local VCSE organisations.

2.11 Community Gift 2025 – Over 600 festive hampers were created to give to families and individuals across Stockton-on-Tees.

2.12 Christmas Toy Appeal - 337 toys were received from the Junction Multibank via the Community Gift and in partnership with VCSE organisations working with vulnerable families.

3.0 Stockton's Response to the National Child Poverty Strategy

3.1 The national child poverty strategy was published in December 2025, outlining the Government's commitment to tackling child poverty. The following section evidences the Council's response to several key commitments outlined in the national child poverty strategy. Further information is provided in Appendix 2.

3.2 The Revenues, Benefits and Welfare Service have, and will continue to play, a key role in maximising the impact of the above-inflation increase to Universal Credit by supporting take-up of those residents that are now eligible for Universal Credit following the increase and also ensuring correct entitlement, preventing income loss, and linking families to wider

financial support. This approach helps ensure that increases in national benefit rates turn into sustainable improvements in household income and child poverty outcomes.

3.3 The Revenues, Benefits and Welfare Service have supported the implementation of the Fair Repayment Rate by supporting families to manage and reduce debt and linking households to wider financial support. The Service continually works with families to reduce debts that sit outside of Universal Credit deductions including rent arrears and Council Tax as well as maximising incomes through targeted take up. This approach has helped ensure reduced deductions turn into meaningful increases in disposable income and improved outcomes for children living in poverty.

3.4 The Revenues, Benefits and Welfare Service support the extension of the Warm Homes Discount. We will, in 2026, target eligible families with children to help them access the scheme and provide a link to help them maximise their income. This approach aims to reduce fuel poverty and improve the wellbeing of children living on low incomes.

3.5 The Council will use the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) to deliver rapid, preventative, and targeted support to households, particularly families with children, at risk of financial crisis. By combining emergency assistance with advice and wider local services, the Council's scheme, currently in development, will help increase financial resilience, protect families from hardship, and prevent children from falling into or deeper into poverty.

3.6 September 2025 was the final stage of the rollout of 30 hours funded childcare for parents with children aged from 9 months to 2 years old. Take-up of the funded hours has been high, for the autumn term 2025, 982 two year olds and 1086 under two's were accessing a place.

3.7 The Free Breakfast Clubs early adopter programme commenced in April 2025 to test and learn before national rollout. Stockton has five primary schools taking part in the early adopter programme. A phased national rollout will commence from April 2026, schools with 40% or higher FSM rate were invited to apply by the deadline date of 5 December. Five primary schools in Stockton have been selected to join the programme. From September 2026 another 2000 primary schools will be invited to apply to the programme.

3.8 Four Stockton primary schools were awarded funding for the first phase of the school-based nursery (SBNs) programme. Applicants can apply for up to £150k of capital funding to create new or additional nursery places.

3.9 The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping strategy was refreshed and launched in July 2025, and the new Housing Strategy is programmed for Cabinet in March 2026. The Council is currently exploring how to accelerate affordable housing strategy within the borough, this includes for example exploring the use of 4 surplus LA sites and working with Registered Providers and housebuilding to maximise funding bids into the Homes England Social and Affordable Homes Programme (grant funding to support affordable housing delivery).

3.10 The Stockton and Portrack area has recently been named as a Phase 2 Pride in Place Programme (PiPP) area. The PiPP is a new government funding programme, aimed at working closely with local communities to decide how to regenerate their local area. We are in the early stages of engaging with our local communities to determine generation and future investment priorities.

4.0 Ongoing Activity

4.1 The following examples demonstrate the Council's ongoing commitment to addressing and tackling child poverty.

4.2 Following the 2025-26 prom project launch event in October 2025, six pop-up shop events have been arranged between November 2025 and May 2026 (appendix 3). This provides young people and families with several opportunities to obtain free or affordable ('pay as you feel') prom outfits and accessories. Free hair and nails workshops are also being planned in partnership with local colleges.

4.3 As part of the Early Intervention and Prevention work in North Thornaby, community engagement activity continues with residents and Mandale Mill Primary School with activities such as cooking sessions and craft sessions. Funding secured from Northern Powergrid for a 'Growing Together in Thornaby' project will link the work being undertaken by Community Engagement Officers in North Thornaby with local schools and the Thornaby Warm Welcomes.

4.4 In response to the Government's introduction of a limit of three branded school uniform items (through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill), guidance will be regularly communicated to Stockton governors, trustees and senior leaders of maintained, academy and free schools across primary and secondary phases via Governor Pupil Premium Training, Education Matters, Governor Briefings. Pre-loved uniform will continue to be available in all Family Hubs all-year round and at the Summer 2026 Here to Help event.

4.5 The Council's free school meals auto-enrolment project group is currently planning how the upcoming eligibility changes can be promoted to schools, parents and carers. With an expected increase in free school meals claims to be processed, the project group is also evaluating when the auto-enrolment project should be undertaken in 2026, taking into account staff capacity and resource pressures.

4.6 Employment and training support continues to be provided through targeted programmes, such as the Government-funded Tees Valley Youth Guarantee Trailblazer, with 129 registrations and 65 placements already secured for young people in Stockton. The Employment and Training Hub's 'Hub on Tour' continues to provide support to residents across the Borough.

4.7 Through continued partnership working with The Multibank, Council staff and partners, will provide free essential items to young people and families in need across the Borough.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Through coordinated action across the Council and partners, thousands of children and families in Stockton-on-Tees have received vital support that eases financial pressure and improves wellbeing. In 2025, initiatives delivered essential items such as school uniforms, winter coats, toys, and stigma-free backpacks; provided access to over 15,500 enriching activities with nutritious meals; and secured additional funding for families in crisis. The Free School Meals auto-enrolment project alone generated more than £480,000 in pupil premium, strengthening educational opportunities.

5.2 Community events and targeted interventions have reduced isolation, increased engagement with local services, and promoted dignity by removing stigma. These efforts represent a sustainable, year-round approach that meets immediate needs while building resilience and stronger community networks. Looking ahead, service changes through Early Intervention and Prevention aim to create lasting improvements for families. These local actions align with national policy and reinforce the Council, and its partners, shared commitment to tackling child poverty and promoting dignity for all families.

Appendix 1: Key Achievements 2025 - Additional information

Family Action Supporting Families Fund: Additional funding of £1500 in the form of Amazon vouchers has been provided by Family Action. The following provides an example of the life-changing impact this fund has already had on families:

Supporting a Young Family Facing Medical Challenges

A young family, recently relocated to the area from India, due to the father's company-sponsored work placement. Following a critical medical emergency, where the family's three-month baby stopped breathing, resulting in an urgent hospital visit, the family were provided with a baby sleep monitor. This device, placed under the cot mattress, will alert the mother if the baby stops breathing during sleep. The monitor has offered both practical and emotional support, allowing the mother to rest more easily and reduce her anxiety. This in turn, has supported her to care for her other children.

Additionally, she has accessed support through a Family Action befriending volunteer, who helped her register at the local library and connect with baby and toddler groups at the family hub and in the wider community. This has reduced the family's social isolation, helped her build friendships, and established a local support network. Her 3-year-old daughter now regularly attends these groups, where she interacts with children her age and has made significant progress in her English-speaking skills, boosting her confidence and supporting her early development.

Here to Help Summer Family Fun Day Event: The event provided access to support available within communities and encouraged residents to engage with and participate in the free activities on offer. 25 support agencies, services and providers attended, each engaging with up to 150 individuals.

Feedback included:

- One young parent told a member of the team that this event was 'a huge help' for her since she would save on the cost of getting her daughter's new uniforms and had chance to talk to people giving information and advice.
- One lady said she remembered attending the event last year and how much it had helped her with school uniform costs. She was able to take uniform for her children and a selection of toiletries.

School Uniform Support: In partnership with Thirteen Housing, uniforms were distributed via small pop-ups during the summer holidays. Staff have also fulfilled several individual requests via professionals working with families.

Holidays Are Fun (HAF) Activity Programme: During Summer 2025, there were over 15,500 bookable free HAF sessions available for eligible school age children across Stockton. Each session included enriching activities and a hot nutritious meal. Additionally, the HAF team also encouraged providers to add paid spaces on our booking system for the first time and 105 of these sessions were booked and attended. There were 53 different activities available, including sports, games, arts and crafts, gymnastics, music and dance, outdoor bushcraft, swimming, ice skating, martial arts, filmmaking, horse riding and paddle sports.

Appendix 2: Stockton's Response to the National Child Poverty Strategy - Additional Information

(note – wording in italics is taken from the Government's national child poverty strategy, '*Our Children, Our Future: Tackling Child Poverty*'.)

Announced a £1 billion package (including Barnett) for a new Crisis and Resilience Fund in England, giving councils funding to protect households from falling into crisis - The current, and final, Household Support Fund scheme being operated by the Council is providing targeted, flexible support to around 5,000 over low-income households with children. Support includes cash payments, vouchers, and wider essentials to help families meet immediate costs such as food, energy, and other daily necessities, reducing the risk of crisis for children and their families.

Expanded government funded childcare to working families in England, for children from the age of nine months backed by thousands of new school-based nursery places - The previous government announced an expansion to funded childcare in their spring budget 2023. Capital funding was awarded to councils to create places to meet the increased demand. To date, 229 new places have been created with this funding in private nurseries and childminders, and an additional 30 school nursery places from the school-based nursery capital grant.

Begun rolling out free breakfast clubs in England, to support parents to boost their working hours - The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill included a requirement for all primary schools to ensure that all children on roll in reception class to year 6 are provided with access to a free breakfast club before the start of the school day which lasts for a least 30 minutes and includes food. The aim of the measures is to give all children, regardless of their circumstances, a great start to the school day, helping break down barriers to opportunity. The free breakfast club will also support parents with the cost of living and support parents to work the jobs and hours they choose.

Increased the Early Years Pupil Premium in England by an unprecedented 45% from £388 per child per year to £570, boosting early learning and development - DfE uplifted the early years pupil premium (EYPP) by over 45%, increasing EYPP rates from 68p per hour in 2024-25 to £1 per hour in 2025-26, equivalent to up to £570 per eligible child per year. This applies to all eligible children aged from 9 months to 4 years old for the first 15 hours of funded childcare. A further uplift has been announced for 2026/27 which will see the rate increased to £1.15/hour. The purpose of EYPP is to improve the educational outcomes of socio-economically disadvantaged children who are eligible for free early years entitlements in an early- years setting.

Started delivering the school-based nursery (SBNs) programme to create tens of thousands of places in school-based nurseries, helping more families access funded childcare and giving children the best start in life in England - The government committed to expanding SBNs across England, with the SBN Capital Grant 2024 to 2025 marking the first phase in its long-term commitment. The primary aim for the first stage was to build more capacity into the early education sector by using surplus space in school buildings made available by falling primary school rolls, where the space may not be needed in the near future for primary provision.

Appendix 3 - A Second Dance Promotional Leaflet



A SECOND *Dance*

Thursday, 1-4pm, 5 Wellington St.
Launch Party
A second dance launch party gives you the chance to try on and pick the perfect prom attire, from suits to dresses and everything in between. Pay what you feel and look amazing!

Oct
30
2025

Wednesday, 3-5:30pm
5 Wellington St.

Pop Up Shop

Nov
26
2025

Wednesday, 3-5:30pm
5 Wellington St.

Pop Up Shop

Jan
14
2026

Wednesday, 1-4pm
5 Wellington St.

Pop Up Shop

Feb
25
2026



A SECOND *Dance*

Wednesday, 1-4pm
5 Wellington St.

Pop Up Shop

Apr
08
2026

Wednesday, 1-4pm
5 Wellington St.

Pop Up Shop

Apr
15
2026

Wednesday, 1-4pm
5 Wellington St.

Pop Up Shop

May
27
2026

Wellington Square Management Centre is a prom donation drop off point from Mon-Sat 9am-12pm

