

Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan Update Report 2026

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Council's [Anti-Poverty Strategy 2024-2027](#) confirms the Council's commitment to reducing inequality and poverty, as previously set out in the [Fairer Stockton-on-Tees \(FSOT\) Strategic Framework](#). The FSOT framework is also integral to the aims of the [Stockton-on Tees Plan](#), and specifically, the priority to create 'Healthy and resilient communities.'

1.2 To support co-ordination of the strategy, the Anti-Poverty Strategy Delivery Group continues to meet regularly to discuss and provide updates on the progress of the strategy's action plan. Members of the group include Council Officers, Thirteen Housing, SDAIS, Catalyst, Moneywise, and Thrive Teesside. In addition, the Positive Living Forum continues to feed their views via regular meetings. The Forum is the Council's Anti-Poverty Lived Experience Group, which was first set up to gather residents' voice on poverty related issues and co-produced the strategy and action plan in 2024.

1.3 This report highlights some of the work undertaken since the implementation of the strategy and initial action plan in July 2024 and is structured according to the strategy and action plan's 4 main priorities:

1. Household Poverty (including food insecurity and poverty, fuel poverty and income maximisation)
2. Child Poverty
3. Participation and Voice
4. Health and Wellbeing

The report also outlines the next steps for developing a phase two action plan for the next 18 months.

2.0 Action Plan Progress 2024-2026

2.1 As agreed, when the strategy was approved in July 2024, the following update highlights progress achieved within the first 18 months of the action plan's implementation. There have been a range of interventions and projects across the Council that have contributed to this action plan; listed below are some examples from each area to provide a flavour of the work undertaken, but this is not an exhaustive list. Further information is provided in Appendix 1.

Priority 1: Household Poverty

Food insecurity and poverty

2.2 The Bread-and-Butter Thing (TBBT): Established in 2024, supports residents at five hubs across the Borough. During 2025, residents bought 13,590 sets of shopping at TBBT, saving over £339,738. The scheme has contributed to a significant reduction in the number of emergency food parcels in the Borough with numbers having fallen by around 50% since 2023. The service is available to all, helping reduce stigma and positively impacting levels of unnecessary food waste. Each hub is run by a team of volunteers.



2.3 Community Cookery: Our Community Engagement Team have collaborated with Learning and Skills to deliver 30 cookery classes to help over 240 residents learn new skills so that they can create healthier meals on a budget. These sessions have been delivered via Warm Welcomes and other groups in some of the more deprived parts of the Borough, such as our four Test, Learn and Grow areas. A donation from business, Galiford Try, paid for 15 slow cookers and air fryers which participants take home after the cookery session.

2.4 Food Aid Fund: Over the last 18 months, central government funding from the Household Support Fund has provided several rounds of Food Aid Funding which have been offered to community organisations supporting residents to reduce food insecurity. £60K of funding has been distributed to 47 organisations in Summer 2024, 54 organisations in Winter 2024/25 and 43 organisations in 2025/26.

2.5 Homeless Team: The homeless team have distributed vouchers to those at risk of food poverty and in a homeless situation and or in need of emergency accommodation. Families that have been placed in hotel or bed and breakfast accommodation have also been given vouchers for food.

2.6 Public Health Funding: Through a range of schemes, Public Health have funded food activity by supporting growing projects and organisations addressing food insecurity. The Grow Your Own project, led by Groundwork, has increased community knowledge and skills around growing and cooking in local community spaces. In Year 1, 40 cooking and 46 growing sessions took place over two sites, and this is continuing to expand. The Public Health Small Grants scheme, further detailed at 2.23, funded Cultivate Tees Valley to deliver growing projects across the Borough, with 80 regular attendees. The Catalyst Healthy Food Options Small Grants scheme, funded through this scheme, offers up to £250 to support individual organisations in piloting new or improved healthy food initiatives.

2.7 Staff Information on Food Support: The FSOT and Community Engagement teams created an information video explaining the different levels of food provision available in the Borough. From foodbanks to pantries, The Bread-and-Butter Thing to hot community food, this video helps support staff better understand the services available to help residents.

Fuel Poverty

2.8 Winter Warm Boxes: In January 2025, 40 warm boxes were distributed to those in need thanks to donations from SDAIS with funding provided by Corona Energy, attendees at the Winter Health Conference, and through the Multibank.

2.9 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.

2.10 Homelessness Christmas Event: In December, the Fairer Stockton team worked in partnership with the Homelessness team to organise a Christmas event for people in temporary accommodation or rough sleeping. The event was held at Salvation Army and several support organisations attended. Recovery Connections, CGL, Moses Project, Citizens Advice, Moneywise, Wellbeing Hub and NHS colleagues supported around 85 people who accessed blood borne virus testing, health checks, free winter coats, toiletries, clothing and a Christmas buffet and gift bag to bring some festive cheer.

2.11 Switch Together Energy (formerly known as Big Community Switch) and Warm Homes Healthy People – Between April and December 2025, 684 Stockton residents registered for Switch Together Energy. If each resident proceeds to switch this will result in just over £618,000 worth of savings for Stockton

residents. Between April 2025 – December 2025, 80 Stockton residents benefitted from boiler servicing or boiler repairs from the Warm Homes Healthy People Scheme. Funding has been allocated to ensure the scheme will continue, reopening to applications in July 2026.

Income Maximisation

2.12 Pension Credit Campaign – The first targeted Pension Credit campaign began in October 2024. Officers contacted 695 customers (just under 700), and 234 of them went on to receive a Pension Credit award. In July 2025, a targeted bimonthly Pension Credit campaign was introduced. Residents that have recently turned pensionable age are contacted and told how to apply for PC and also have a council phone number that they can phone for good advice. So far, 233 residents have been contacted, generating 45 claims. Overall, the Pension Credit campaigns have achieved a 30% success rate.

2.13 Learning and Skills: During the 24/25 Academic Year, Learning and Skills saw over 3200 residents enrol on courses with a 90.3% Adult Skills Achievement Rate. The Apprenticeship Achievement Rate of 82.9% was 22.4% higher than the national benchmark. 84.4% of learners progressed to higher level learning or employment following completion of the learning programme and notably, 47.5% of all learners engaged came from a recognised disadvantaged area.

2.14 Employment and Training Hub: Over the past 18 months, the Hub has delivered a comprehensive programme of support, enabling residents to access work, progress into better employment, and improve their financial resilience. During this time, the Hub on Tour has taken the full range of Employment & Training Hub services directly across the Borough, delivering support across 54 locations. This outreach model has enabled us to engage residents who may otherwise face barriers to accessing the town centre. The Hub delivers tailored programmes, including Connect to Work, Youth Guarantee Trailblazer and Workwell, supporting economically inactive residents with personalised, one-to-one guidance. These programmes address barriers such as health conditions, confidence, and lack of work experience, helping people move closer to or into employment. Since its official launch in September 2025, the Tees Valley Youth Guarantee Trailblazer has already delivered tangible outcomes for young people in Stockton. To date, 48 young people have been supported into paid work placements in Stockton.

2.15 Here to Help Events: The Here to Help programme delivers three events which support residents with the Cost of Living and related issues. Each event has a specific focus and target audience. The summer Here to Help is aimed at families, providing donated school uniforms and a wide range of family support. The Winter Health and Wellbeing Festival brings together a wealth of information and support, helping people prepare for winter. Something New for You tackles the January blues by helping people connect with others, try new things and access vital information and support. Since our first event in 2024, over 3,000 residents have attended a Here to Help event.



2.16 Here to Help Hub: The programme is supported by our [Here to Help](#) 'one-stop' online hub, printed booklet and Cost of Living newsletters which provide accessible year-round information. The FSOT team have attended various SBC employee events to make sure colleagues also have access to this information

2.17 Multibank: Since the launch of the Multibank in November 2024, local organisations, NHS and council teams have been able to access hundreds of thousands of free, donated products to support residents. From toys to toiletries, cleaning products to clothing, these items, donated by Amazon, are making a real difference to families in need. For example, children have received Christmas gifts, school supplies, backpacks and sports equipment, ensuring they are not excluded from important experiences and learning due to their family's income. Since the launch, 725,418 units have been distributed across Stockton-on-Tees with an estimated value of £4,236,442.



Priority 2: Child Poverty

A [report](#) on the progress made by the Council and its partners during 2025 to alleviate child poverty across the borough was taken to Cabinet in March 2026.

2.18 Child Poverty Network: 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.

2.19 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.

2.20 A Second Dance Prom Project: A member of our Positive Living Forum raised the issue of the impact of school proms on family budgets with young people often being excluded due to poverty. This led to the 'A Second Dance Project'. This is a partnership between SBC and Wellington Square and provides an alternative way to prepare for prom. All items are donated by residents and local businesses and to date we have provided around 80 young people with their dream prom outfit.



2.21 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.

2.22 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.

2.23 School Uniforms: Our summer Here to Help event collected hundreds of pre-loved and donated new school uniforms. These were given out at the Here, pop-up shops and other community events. 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.



Priority 3: Participation and Voice

2.24 BMBF: Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF) continue to hold monthly meetings for young people to act as a voice for the young people of the borough. The Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People attend the meetings bimonthly, and the young people hold a 'question time' style session with them. The BMBF young people set the agendas for their meetings and have invited SBC services and external organisations who have, for example, undertaken first aid specifically for young people related to knife crime. Through an annual priority setting event, the young people decide which projects and activities they would like to focus on for the year. The young people continue to volunteer at BMBF events with over 700 volunteering hours contributed annually.

2.25 Positive Living Forum

The Fairer Stockton team continues to hold Positive Living Forum meetings every six weeks. Their experiences have guided initiatives like the prom project detailed above. Our Positive Living Forum has invited other SBC services to attend their meetings and have fed their experiences back to them, helping them to evaluate and improve their offer.

2.26 Equality & Poverty Impact Assessments

To support the Fairer Stockton-on-Tees strategy, it is vital that all decisions taken within the Council are viewed through a poverty lens. To ensure we are doing this consistently, launched in early 2025 an updated Equality & Poverty Impact Assessment (EPIA). Key progress made as an example is that in the first year alone 53 EPIA's were completed and over 20 Officers have received training on the EPIA's process. It is now compulsory for all colleagues to complete an Equality & Poverty Impact Assessment when developing a new or revised service, policy, strategy, practice or plan. Further work is now planned as part of a Phase 2 roll out plan to further embed EPIA's into how the organisations decision making.

2.27 Test, Learn and Grow areas/Early Intervention and Prevention examples:

Through the 'Let's Talk' Hardwick & Salters Lane session with residents and organisations delivering in the area such as Thirteen, North Star and Cleveland Police, an action plan has been developed highlighting residents' priorities. One of these priorities was for diversionary activities for young people. Working with Hardwick in Partnership and Evolve Sports Charity, a 10-week boxing session was introduced taking place in the community. The sessions have continued to be a huge success with up to 30 young people attending every session.



Through engagement with residents as part of the Mandale Early Intervention & Prevention project, it transpired that families were not accessing the Thornaby Family Hub due to its location. Through working with Mandale Mill Primary School, the community and Thornaby Family Hub, Family Hub sessions are now delivered out of Vineyard Church. Vineyard also run a baby bank and other family activities so it is hoped that the community will now access more of these services too. Families also spoke about a need for SEN support for their children. Peer to Peer support sessions are now held in the community on a weekly basis.



Priority 4: Health & Wellbeing

2.28 Community Spaces, Warm Welcomes and Social Isolation and Loneliness Working Group

Currently, there are 68 Community Spaces venues and 10 Warm Welcomes sessions operating across the Borough. The scheme has benefitted from £60,000 of Public Health funding and continues to provide residents with a wide range of opportunities to access social activities, support and advice services (e.g. welfare advice and Employment and Training Hub's *Hub on Tour*). A Council-led social isolation and loneliness working group has also been created to develop a strategic approach to tackle these issues and strengthening community connections.



2.29 Public Health Small Grants Scheme:

This focuses on funding grass roots organisations to improve health and wellbeing, connecting communities and reducing inequalities. Successful organisations were awarded up to a value of £5,000 to deliver projects that meet the key criteria of being active, connecting with others and/or eating well. Since July 2024, £140,000 of funding has been given to 36 organisations.

2.30 Migration Support Team: The team utilised Government funding to support Refugees and Asylum Seekers by holding quarterly Services Fairs at a central venue. They are held in partnership with Refugee Futures based on research carried out by Durham University, with an aim to address and overcome barriers in accessing services, providing practical financial advice and support including debt advice, budgeting, and managing money, as well as promoting community pantries to access low-cost food provisions. The fairs also provide an opportunity for the many attendees to understand how various systems work and make it easier to access housing, employment and training as well as health services to overcome disparity. They have grown significantly since the first pilot fair, are very well attended, with over 20 organisations now

regularly attending after recognising the value of coming together to support refugee and asylum seeker communities.

2.31 Stockton Volunteer Driver Service:

SBC have commissioned Volunteering Matters to develop a volunteer driver service aimed at reducing barriers to services and enabling residents to connect both with each other and vital support. Through the Stockton Volunteer Driver Service (SVDS), trained volunteers now provide safe, door-to-door journeys for those unable to use conventional transport to access medical appointments or social groups that combat loneliness, restoring confidence and independence. The SVDS now has over 300 beneficiaries, supported to date on over 4,000 journeys. Many using the service describe what a lifeline it is for them and how they have accessed opportunities that they would otherwise have missed due to financial costs or a lack of confidence in public transport.

3.0 Next Steps

3.1 Considering the continuation of the cost of living negatively affecting the Borough's resident's, it is necessary to co-produce an updated action plan to underpin the remaining 18 months of the strategy. Therefore, it is proposed that:

- Any current actions which have not been fully achieved are carried forward and included in the updated action plan.
- The Anti-Poverty Strategy Delivery Group will meet to discuss and propose actions for the updated action plan.
- The Positive Living Forum will meet to discuss and propose actions for the updated action plan.
- Progress against the renewed action plan will be brought back to Cabinet in a further 18 months' time.

Conclusion

The first 18 months of delivering the Anti-Poverty Strategy 2024–2027 demonstrate clear progress in tackling the causes and impacts of poverty across Stockton-on-Tees. Through strong partnership working, targeted interventions, and the continued involvement of the Positive Living Forum, the Council and its partners have delivered measurable improvements for residents supporting thousands of households with food, energy, income maximisation, health and wellbeing, and increased opportunities for children and families.

The outcomes highlighted in this update show that the strategy is functioning as intended: reducing inequalities, improving access to essential services, and strengthening resilience within our communities. Initiatives such as The Bread-and-Butter Thing, the Pension Credit campaign, the Free School Meals auto-enrolment project, Warm Welcome spaces, and community-based health and wellbeing programmes are all driving positive, tangible results.

However, with the cost-of-living pressures continuing to affect residents, it is essential that the Council maintains momentum. A refreshed action plan for the next 18 months with the Anti-Poverty Strategy Delivery Group, partners, and people with lived experience will ensure that the next phase remains relevant, ambitious, and aligned to the needs of our communities.

Appendix 1

1. The Bread-and-Butter Thing

Volunteers prepare and pack shopping at each hub and strong teams are now well established. Volunteers have told us about the benefits of giving their time to TBBT and we celebrate their contributions with an annual 'Thank you' event. One told us, 'Volunteering at Bread and Butter has changed my life for the better. It gives me a sense of purpose. The relationships I have formed with the other volunteers and customers have helped me be more understanding of others.'

2. Food Aid Fund

Local knowledge has helped us focus each round of funding to ensure residents were able to be met. One round asked providers to think specifically about culturally sensitive foods, another allowed for funding to be used to purchase hygiene products, responding to needs identified by the Stockton Food Power Network.

3. Here to Help Programme - feedback

Following this year's Something New for You in Billingham, one 92-year-old lady told us her good health was 'all down to coming to things like this event, Warm Welcomes and the trips we go on together.' She said it keeps her mobile and her mind active, being with her friends and doing things together.

Another resident attending last year said, 'The Something New for You event was very interesting, I wasn't expecting the event to have so much to see and do. I got some great advice from CAB, I had put off going into town to see them, so it was very convenient for me that they were at the event. I got the help I needed as well as taking part in a boxing demonstration, creating my own piece of lino printing and enjoying a cup of tea with friends.'

One professional spoke about being able to, 'help some customers directly with their personal energy accounts, give advice to 2 more and re-direct people to CAB and NEA support. I have also promoted eco measures to several people.'

Two ladies from the Salters Lane Warm Welcome session said that they really enjoyed the event, especially the cooking demonstration as they had never tried avocados before. They have recreated the recipe at home since the event and even added their own little extra bits! They have also signed up to the wood carving group in Billingham and are looking forward to that.

At our Summer Family Fun Day, one resident praised the council for offering free transport to bring families in from the Clarences and for the items they all received to help reduce the cost of preparing children for the new academic year.

Organisations attending praised this event saying, 'It was a great event, perfect for promoting valuable services in the community.' Salvation Army added, 'About 40 people spoken to on Saturday attended our Messy Church on Sunday.'

4. A Second Dance Prom Project - feedback

People have spoken to us about how welcoming and inclusive our A Second Dance events have been. People praised the quality of the outfits, the choice available and how helpful the Prom Project team were in helping people find their perfect outfit. One parent said, 'Amazing event! A lovely idea for families on low incomes especially.' Another said, 'Absolutely brilliant idea – recycle/reuse and making prom affordable and accessible for all.'

5. Test Learn and Grow and Early Intervention and Prevention (EIP)

At the first Boxing session in Hardwick, one dad commented how pleased he was that his son was interested in attending the boxing so he would use his computer less, enjoy some physical activity and make some new friends. He has attended 9 out of the 10 sessions so far and his dad has mentioned how he is becoming more confident and interested in what he is eating, trying to eat more healthily and enjoy more physical activity by coming to the sessions riding his bike. He is enjoying working with a professional

boxer who has inspired him in a positive way. Further funding to continue these sessions has been secured from North Star Housing and through National Lottery Funding which will secure the sessions for the next year.

Alongside the SEND sessions in Thornaby, Learning & Skills delivered a story telling 4 week course with parents from Mandale Mill Primary School, with one parent commenting, "courses like this at the school organised by the team have been a lifeline to me. I was involved in the hot chocolate session at Christmas and made friends with parents who I haven't spoken to before and I now meet them on a regular basis and go to different groups with them".