

A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees



Anti-Poverty Strategy 2024-2027

Contents Page

	<u>Page number</u>
Foreword	3
Acknowledgements	4
1. Introduction: Our Aim and Approach	5
2. What do we mean by poverty?	6
3. What does poverty look like in our Borough?	8
4. How have we produced this strategy?	12
5. What have local people told us (the lived experience of poverty)?	13
6. What have we done and what are we going to do?	15
7. Measuring success, how will we know that we are making a difference?	18
Glossary of Terms TBA	19

Foreword

This is our first Anti-Poverty Strategy and reflects our commitment that every resident in our Borough should have the right to live a fulfilling life, one which is fair and equal. ***Our ambition is for all our residents to live fulfilling lives, free from the effects of poverty.***

Living in poverty can prevent our residents reaching their potential and can impact on people's health, educational attainment, employment, civic engagement and their health and wellbeing. Through this strategy, we aim to support those directly affected by poverty by offering opportunities, support, advice, and information. We recognise that achieving our goal will not be quick or easy, nor is it something we can do alone. Our shared ambition is one which places both our communities and partners at the core of our delivery plan.

The development of our strategy has involved our residents and a wide range of local partner organisations, facilitated by the Anti-Poverty Project Group. I wish to thank all who have been involved and particularly those members of the Positive Living Group who have given up their time and worked directly with us. The voice of those with lived experience of poverty has been essential in developing both the strategy and supporting action plan.

In many ways, this is just the start of a new approach directly with our residents to tackling poverty within the Borough. It is hoped that the recommendations from this strategy will inspire and inform further work with partners to pursue a Fairer Stockton-on-Tees.

Cllr Bob Cook

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Acknowledgments

We want to thank members of the Positive Living Group (the voices of local people describing their experiences) and the wider stakeholder group, for their time, commitment, and dedication to developing this work and to all those in our wider communities who had a 'conversation' with us. We want to specifically highlight Thrive for their input, advice, and guidance. Their support and challenge ensured we listened and understood the best way to allow our residents to help influence, shape and develop our strategy and Action Plan.

This is just the start; we will continue with resident conversations and undertake regular reviews of our strategy together the Positive Living Group, our wider partners and wider communities to ensure we continue to collectively take the correct actions to tackle poverty in our Borough.



1. Introduction: Our Aim and Approach

This strategy, and supporting action plan, evidence Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's ongoing commitment to tackling poverty and improving the lives of the Borough's residents. It is aligned and supports other key strategic plans including our **2023-2026 Council Plan, A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees Framework (our Strategic Framework for Tackling Inequalities) and Powering our Future programme**.¹

The effects of the coronavirus pandemic, twinned with the current cost of living situation, have resulted in more of our residents experiencing poverty.

- Inequality is a challenge in our Borough. Our Borough is home to around 200,000 people, with areas of places of affluence sitting alongside areas of deprivation.
- More than 25% of our wards are in the 10% most deprived in the country.
- There is a gap of up to 19 years in average female life expectancy between the most deprived and least deprived wards.²

We are committed to fighting these inequalities, our aim through our Anti-Poverty Strategy is that every resident in our Borough should have the right to live a fulfilling life, one which is fair and equal. ***Our ambition is for all our residents to live fulfilling lives, free from the effects of poverty.*** To achieve this, we will continue to work at a local, regional, and national level to address the policies and practices that cause, prolong, or exacerbate poverty.

This strategy is built on a partnership approach and is owned by our partners who have an essential role to play in preventing and reducing poverty in our Borough. This includes public agencies, the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, businesses, and most importantly our communities themselves. We will continue to have community conversations as hearing the voices of those with lived experience of poverty is essential if we are to address both current and meet evolving needs. We plan to gather feedback on a regular basis to understand the impact we are having in supporting those experiencing poverty in our Borough and will update our action plan appropriately.

¹ A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees Framework: https://www.stockton.gov.uk/media/2374/Strategic-framework-a-Fairer-Stockton-on-Tees/pdf/A_Fairer_Stockton-on-Tees_-_A_strategic_framework_for_tackling_inequalities_2021-2023_.pdf?m=1648571500877; Powering Our Futures Update: <https://moderngov.stockton.gov.uk/documents/s5847/POF.pdf>

² Sources: Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD, 2019); Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2022); Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID, 2022).

2. What do we mean by poverty?

Given that there is no one definition of poverty, measuring poverty is not easy. A wide range of statistics and measures are used to capture poverty levels. A range of terms are used to describe poverty, for example, relative poverty, absolute poverty, destitution, low income, deprivation and disadvantage.

Our definition of poverty is based on what our residents have described as '**not having enough to live on, even for the basic essentials we need just to get by**'.

The UK Government commonly uses two measures of low income to describe poverty. These low-income measures can be calculated before or after housing costs are taken into account.

Relative poverty - household income of less than 60% of the current UK average. In 2021, households whose total earnings were less than £17,760 would have been classed as living in relative poverty.

- **Before** housing costs, one in six people had an income below the poverty line.
- **After** housing costs, one in five households in the UK had an income below the poverty line and 30% of children lived in households below the poverty line.

Absolute poverty - the Government's definition is those who earn less than 60% of the median income of 2010/11. Therefore, in 2021 households living on less than £13,166 after housing costs would have been classed as living in absolute poverty. This definition is not the same as other organisations' definitions of absolute poverty. It is not an international poverty line, and it is not defined as being able to afford essentials.

In 2021/22, 19% (7,298) of children were living in absolute low income families in our Borough compared with 15.3% nationally.³

Who is at risk of poverty?

Conversations held with our residents and discussions with partner organisations clearly suggest that we can all be at risk of poverty i.e. any one of us can suddenly have our lives turned upside down by illness or injury, loss of a job or break up of a family.

However, we do not all have the same chance of experiencing poverty, for some there is virtually no risk and for others it is very high. This is because all our residents do not have

³ Source: *Office for Health Improvement and Disparities*.

access to the same level of resources to help them avoid falling into poverty, to survive poverty or to escape a period of poverty without it leaving a long-lasting effect on their lives.

3. What does poverty look like in our Borough?

Key facts and figures



Average male life expectancy is 77.9 years.

In some areas of the Borough, life expectancy is lower than 67 years, which is up to 17 years lower than other areas which have a life expectancy of over 84 years.



Average female life expectancy is 81.1 years.

In some areas of the Borough, life expectancy is lower than 72 years, which is up to 18 years lower than other areas which have a life expectancy of over 90 years.



Under 75 mortality rate* from all causes (2022).

Stockton-on-Tees is 397.5, compared to England 342.3.

**Directly age-standardised rate per 100,000 population.*



19% of the population live with a limiting long-term condition against 21.6% in the North East.

The percentage is highest in Stockton Town Centre (27%) and lowest in Ingleby Barwick West (8%).



7.5% of the population aged 18-24 (965) are claiming out-of-work benefits against 4.6% nationally.



In 2021/22, 24.9% of population aged 16-64 are economically inactive against 21.2% nationally.



In 2022/23, 18.7% of children were living in relative low income families against 19.8% nationally

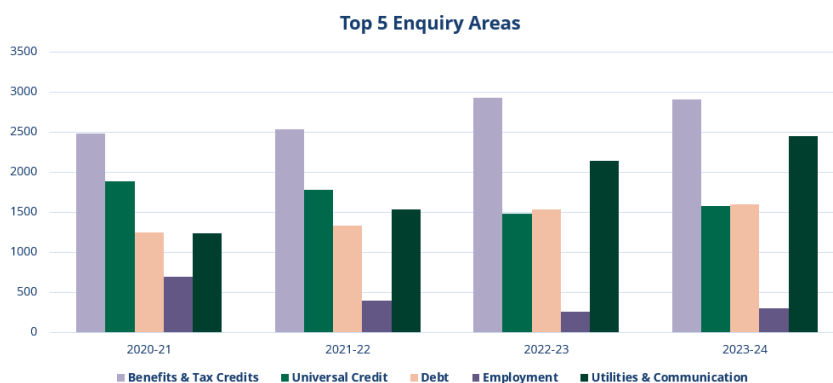


In 2022/23, there were more than 550 children in our care, a rate of 134 per 10,000 children, against a national rate of 71 per 10,000 children.

The Centre for Progressive Policy’s Cost of Living Vulnerability Index shows Stockton-on-Tees to be one of the most vulnerable local authorities in the country.⁴

- Our poorest residents face a 3 percent higher inflation rate than average because a much greater proportion of their income is spent on essentials of food and energy. For them, it is a struggle to afford the basic essentials of everyday living.
- Stockton-on-Tees has some of the highest poverty and deprivation rates in the country.
- As a Borough, we have poorer health, higher unemployment and economic inactivity rates and high benefit claimant rates.
- As of April 2024, there were 23,061 people claiming universal credit in the Borough.
- In some wards, there are lower levels of educational attainment and lower quality housing stock (around 60,000 houses are estimated to lack basic insulation) than most other local authorities.
- Child poverty rates are particularly high; 32.6% of children were in poverty in 2021/22 in Stockton-on-Tees. This is equal to 14,608 children.⁵

The following graph outlines the top 5 enquiry areas of those accessing the Stockton-on-Tees District & Advice Information Service, from 2020-21 to 2023-24.⁶ This data shows that there has been a significant increase in utilities and communications enquiries in recent years.



⁴ Centre for Progressive Policy, <https://www.progressive-policy.net>.


⁵ End Child Poverty, <https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty/>.

⁶ Source: Stockton & District Information and Advice Service.

The Council’s Welfare Support team have continued their ongoing work to alleviate poverty through a range of initiatives including the Back on Track scheme which includes providing cash awards, food vouchers, home delivery and referral to food banks. To access this support, a referral is not needed but it is means tested as the scheme is designed to provide short-term ‘crisis-point’ help. The following table details the number of people who have been supported by the Council’s Welfare Support Team:

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Discretionary Housing Payments	1674	1419	1347	1200
Food	783	908	1266	935
Fuel	617	848	1279	839
Settlement	627	590	659	647
Income Maximisation	1763	2951	3542	3128

Food insecurity and poverty remains a key concern across the Borough, meaning more of our residents are accessing food banks and food pantries. The following image outlines the different types of food support available and eligibility for accessing each service⁷:



Foodbanks	Community Pantries	The Bread and Butter Thing
Works to alleviate food poverty	Works to alleviate food poverty	Works to alleviate food poverty
Prepacked food parcels are free of charge	Food items are sold at a discounted price, e.g. £1 for 8 items. Customer can choose the items.	Prepacked food bags sold at a fixed, discounted price. Three bags sold for £8.50 (worth approx. £25 if bought in a supermarket)
Referral required to access food parcels	No referral needed, not means-tested	No referral needed, not means-tested
Designed to be short-term, crisis point help	Designed to be a longer-term solution to food poverty	Designed to be a longer-term solution to food poverty, often used as a ‘top-up shop’

←
→

During March 2024, over 1,000 residents accessed a foodbank. The top reasons for referral were⁸:

- Rising cost of essentials
- Priority debt
- Impact of health
- Low/insufficient income
- Budgeting Issues

⁷ Source: Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network, Catalyst Stockton-on-Tees

⁸ Source: Stockton & District Information and Advice Service

As part of local efforts to alleviate the problems associated with the cost of living, five **Bread and Butter Thing Hubs** have been established across the Borough in 2023/24 (funded through monies secured by the Household Support Fund and Thirteen Housing). The Bread and Butter Thing is an initiative aiming to ‘make life more affordable for people on low incomes, build stronger communities and reduce food waste’.⁹ The 5 Hubs enable our residents to purchase weekly groceries at a reduced price.

Within the first six months of its operation, almost 7,000 people across the Borough have utilised The Bread-and-Butter Thing Hubs. On average, residents have saved around £25 per ‘shop’ (based on a 3-bag ‘shop’ priced at £8.50) meaning that overall residents have, so far, saved around £168,800 through this scheme. This demonstrates that there is a significant demand for this service, which is often oversubscribed in some hubs.



⁹The Bread and Butter Thing, <https://www.breadandbutterthing.org/>.

4. How have we produced this strategy?

To ensure the voices of local people experiencing poverty have informed our strategy and action plan we have adopted a partnership approach. This has included for example:

- Anti-Poverty organisation **Thrive** leading on the recruitment and support to Peer Led Researchers to carry out 6 in depth interviews.
- Feedback from **Thrive Facing Futures** project (around 50 lighter touch interviews with members of the community).
- Direct conversations with residents with lived experience (**Positive Living Group**) to understand their experiences and also to seek their involvement in the development of the strategy (what it would look like, how we can bring the strategy to life, how we encourage those with lived experience to help develop solutions and their ongoing role in monitoring the impact of the strategy).
- Feedback from 500 surveys undertaken as part of the **Project Harmony** (residents in the Stockton Town Centre wards).
- The **Residents Survey** feedback where over 1400 replies were also considered.
- Feedback from more than 30 Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council staff, as the majority are residents of the borough.
- Feedback from a range of local partnerships, including for example Infinity and our network of 7 Community Partnerships, Multi-Agency network, Refugee and Asylum Seekers Forum, amongst many others.
- Feedback from 80 anti-poverty questionnaires with individuals and groups, including residents accessing the Borough's Community Spaces and groups such as **Starfish, Red Balloons, Refugee Futures** and **Bright Minds Big Futures**.
- Feedback from **Anti-Poverty Delivery Group** members who actively sought and gathered the views of individuals they support.

5. What have local people told us (the lived experience of poverty)?

Key themes which have emerged from our conversations include:

Housing costs and
access to affordable
housing

Rising costs of food
and hygiene products

Rising energy bills

Access to GPs, dentists
and mental health
services

Benefit sanctions

Debt

Mental health

Loneliness (social isolation)

Lack of jobs

School costs (uniform food

Digital exclusion

trips)

Access to foodbanks and food
pantries

Furniture poverty

Increase support
for asylum

Training and
upskilling needs

Stigma associated with poverty

The following extracts are taken from the in-depth peer research conversations conducted by Thrive Teesside and provide a snapshot of the key issues and concerns facing the Borough's residents:

As a single working mum of 4 children, times are tough. I'm behind on bills living in an unaffordable property that is overcrowded...Lots of weekends are spent in the house recently, *reduced activities i.e. no play areas access. Trying to reduce heating costs but a struggle to keep warm.*

The area is declining with less jobs, soaring food and energy prices people are struggling to make ends meet so are relying more on benefits and food banks.

I'm always making changes to be able to fit in daily life. I've had to weigh up options and make cuts or compromises until I can next do something. Some weeks if we can't afford to buy food I'll have to attend food banks or if I can't afford fuel to get to work I have to ask people for a lift until I'm next able to fill my car etc.

What changes in Stockton would make life easier for people struggling? - *More opportunities to access community education and opportunities to enable them to reach their potential by removing the many barriers that people face in highly deprived areas.*

6. What have we done and what are we going to do?

Together with our partners we are delivering a range of services aimed at supporting those in poverty. The listing below is just a snapshot of what we are already doing:

- In 2022, 17,000 households were assisted with Council Tax Reduction. 7,500 were assisted with Housing Benefits and 679 awards were granted as Discretionary Housing Payment.
- Since 2012, the Council has supported 4,024 households across the Borough through its Warm Home Health People scheme. 1156 boiler services/repairs have been conducted. 117 replacement boilers have been installed.
- Over 70 people have registered for CV support, advice and interview tips via the Council's Employment and Training Hub's 'Hub on Tour' project.
- More than 20 Learning and Skills courses have been held across Community Spaces venues including Billingham, Stockton, Thornaby and Redhill Family Hubs. Other catering and nutrition courses designed to support people manage their budgets, in response to rising food and energy costs, included *Air Fryer Recipes*, *Family Dinner Favourites on a Budget*, *Festive Cooking on a Budget* and *Skills to Pay the Bills*.
- The Council continues to work with Tees Credit Union (Moneywise) to encourage Council staff to access debt advice and support and open savings accounts via its payroll savers scheme.
- Stockton & District Advice and Information Service's (SDAIS) work on income maximisation has brought £5,364,446 of previously unclaimed benefit entitlement to vulnerable people across the Borough.

This strategy's supporting Action Plan is focused on 4 key priority areas. Our 4 priorities have been informed through conversations with our residents and engagement with our partners. Underneath each of these is a section around the action needed and a description on how we will get there. As stated throughout this strategy, integral to all these actions is the ongoing work with our partners and residents. The priorities are as follows:

1. Household Poverty

Key actions are focused on tackling food insecurity and poverty, reducing fuel poverty and income maximisation. This will involve developing a food insecurity plan, establishing a fuel poverty forum and widening access to targeted debt management and support.

2. Child Poverty

Key actions are focused on addressing the emerging issues at home and in school which directly affect children and young people and their families/carers. This will involve maximising free school meals take up, implementing a school uniform affordability action plan and the targeted promotion of Healthy Starts Vouchers to increase take up amongst eligible families.

3. Participation and Voice

Key actions are focused on ensuring that an inclusive approach is taken when incorporating the voices of those affected by poverty. This will involve increasing the voices of young people in decision making, working with residents whose voices may not have been captured through existing networks, for example those who are homeless, and increasing engagement with refugees and asylum seekers.

4. Health & Wellbeing

Key actions are focussed on improving access to both physical and mental health services and support. This will involve minimising the risk of social isolation and loneliness, strengthening suicide prevention and increasing access to hygiene products.

In addition to these actions, it is vital that all decisions taken within the Council are viewed through a poverty lens. To ensure we are doing this consistently we will be launching an updated Equality & Poverty Impact Assessment (with a supporting toolkit). This has been designed to ensure that our policies, practices, and decision-making processes are fair, do not present barriers to disadvantaged and protected groups and those affected by poverty.

Moving forward, we are commitment to continuous engagement with residents and partners. This will be undertaken by engaging with:

Anti-Poverty Delivery Group: This group will drive forward the Anti-Poverty Strategy and action plan and it includes partners from the public and VCSE sectors.

Positive Living Group: This group will feed into our anti-poverty work using the insights, priorities and messages from participatory action and research undertaken by groups of people with lived experience of poverty. This work has been and will continue to be supported by Thrive Teesside.

Cost of Living Network and project groups: These groups were set up to help the enable the Council to address specific changes faces by our residents due to cost-of-Living challenges.

Health and Wellbeing Board: The Health and Wellbeing Board leads the improvement of health and wellbeing for Stockton-on-Tees. Our anti-poverty work will feed directly into this board.

Infinity: This forum is the Financial Inclusion Partnership in the Borough, comprising organisations in the Borough that are committed to providing and progressing financial inclusion.

7. Measuring success, how will we know that we are making a difference?

We will:

- Undertake further local surveys to understand the views of our residents.
- Monitor progress against key poverty data measures to see how things are progressing, for example the data sets agreed to measure the wider Fairer Stockton-on-Tees programme.
- Undertake regular monitoring of our action plan to ensure we are moving forward in a timely manner.

Glossary of Terms

TBA