

Southend-on-Sea City Council

Report of Executive Director, Adults & Communities
to
Cabinet

on
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Report prepared by:
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Agenda
Item No.

Tackling Poverty Strategy 2023-2026

1. Purpose of Report

This report seeks to inform Cabinet on work undertaken to produce a Tackling Poverty Strategy for the city and present the draft strategy for comment.

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet reviews the strategy making comments for improvement and seeking to reach agreement.

3. Background

There was a motion raised at Council regarding Welfare Assistance and Fuel Poverty (March 2021). Action was recommended to develop an Anti-Poverty Plan to address inequalities in the Borough.

- 3.1 To ensure the Council has a robust strategic plan which clearly articulates the priorities for the council to support its residents who are in poverty and those who are falling into poverty with the rise of the cost of living.
- 3.2 To develop the Strategy with members of the Tackling Poverty Steering Group
- 3.3 To co-produce the strategy in consultation with residents who have lived experience of poverty and local services in Southend-on-Sea
- 3.4 To ensure the project is embedded, that the Executive Director for Adults and Communities acts as a Senior Responsible Officer, and a Head of Service is identified to lead and be accountable for implementation of desired outcomes of the strategy.

4. Engagement and co-production journey:

4.1 Professional Engagement :

We held a two-day professional workshop on the following topics: Food insecurity, Fuel and Housing Insecurity, Financial Inclusion, Skill & Jobs. 47 representatives from charities, community groups, faith organisations, public services and health professionals came to one or more of the workshops.

Alongside the face-to-face workshop, we also launched a consultation page on 'You say Southend'. In total we had 60 responses.

4.2 Residents' engagement:

We have launched an online consultation called "Help shape our new Tackling Poverty Strategy " on 'Your say Southend' with a household survey which has had 643 responses. 240 of those responses were collected through paper surveys and face to face engagements.

4.3 Co-Production journey

Southend-on-Sea City Council volunteered to trial a process called 'Working Together for Change', as a way of building local capacity for co-production, to understand what matters most to people experiencing poverty in Southend. 26 people attended the workshops which were held at a local community venue in August 2022. The mix of people included 15 local people experiencing poverty from a diverse range of backgrounds.

We have regrouped with the same participant in November 2022 to show them the draft strategy and asked their feedback.

5. Tackling Poverty Strategy vision

Our vision is to make Southend a more inclusive place, working together with local partners and residents to reduce and prevent poverty. Where all residents can realise their potential and access the benefits of living in a safe, diverse and vibrant city

6. Scope

- 6.1 The strategy will not be owned by the council, but it will be a joint pledge by our community to act on our priorities.
- 6.2 Alongside the engagement with professionals and residents to understand the current issues people are facing we also looked at local data to make sure our research is evidence based and data led.
- 6.3 This strategy focuses on people who are already experiencing poverty and those who are tipping into poverty due to the rise of the cost-of-living.
- 6.4 The strategy is a three-year plan which will include interventions for the cost-of-living crisis, the current fuel insecurity and inflation, but will look at longer term sustainable solutions too.
- 6.5 We will identify action plans and baselines to evaluate and monitor progress on a yearly basis as we are aware how much the financial landscape can change in each year. Reviewing the action plans yearly will give us the flexibility to adapt to change.

7. Tackling Poverty Priorities

7.1 Tackling barriers to access support

a) Desired outcomes:

- People experiencing poverty are valued and listened to by decision-makers and organisational leaders.
- Stigma is reduced, through campaigns and sharing real people's stories.
- Mental health, disability, digital exclusion, embarrassment, shame, isolation, language, and a lack of literacy skills are no longer barriers to accessing services.
- Support is available across the City via accessible methods both online and offline.
- Strong community partnerships exist between services who support people in poverty, enabling a holistic approach, networking, signposting, and joint delivery of services.

b) Strategic Objectives

- To improve communication and information sharing between professionals.
- To ensure we use various methods of communication that are accessible to all residents.
- To improve the universal digital offer to residents of Southend.
- Tackling the stigma of poverty, and the additional support needed for people with disabilities and mental health issues through media campaigns, trainings and listening to people's lived experience.
- To improve access to professionals in face-to-face settings.

7.2 Enhance people's resilience

a) Desired outcomes:

- People with low incomes are financially resilient, supported by a strong offer of advice on money maximisation, access to jobs and skills opportunities and affordable housing.
- People who cannot maximise their income, for example people with disabilities and their carers, single people (especially single parents and single pensioners) and low paid working people, are identified, and support will be tailored to their needs.
- Through working closely with South East Essex Alliance, healthcare inequalities will be reduced at local level and poverty will no longer reduce possibility to live a long and healthy life.

b) Strategic Objectives

- To support more people to adopt healthy behaviours.
- Create a more inclusive local economy in Southend that ensures more local people and businesses benefit from the City's regeneration and growth.
- To explore how we can more effectively use data to target support to those most in need.
- To upskill people and improve residents' financial literacy

- To strengthen Southend Food Alliance and the local food offer and support them to upskill residents about cooking, food and nutrition.
- To support more people to stay in education, learn new skills and improve work readiness.
- To support more people who are experience fuel poverty.

7.3 Advocating for long term change in Government policies

a) Desired outcomes:

- The city's council, partners and communities will act as advocates for change on behalf of local people and lived experience. We will share the knowledge we collect with Government departments, MPs and officials for change, and champion more effective policy making at a national level.
- Government policy is designed to effectively alleviate and eradicate poverty.

b) Advocating on a national level

Benefits

- On eligibility reform: widening support for working households
- Limit deductions from Universal Credit for prior overpayments/sanctions
- Remove the benefit cap and two-child limit
- To raise the Local Housing Allowance rates with the rise of the local private rented prices

Cost of living and energy

- For regulation on pre-payment meter prices
- For more grant and scheme for insulation and alternative energy access
- For subsidized childcare

7. Corporate Implications

Southend 2050 Road Map has included the 'Lead appointed and Task & Finish group established to develop measures to tackle financial inequalities, including coordination of the Food Alliance'

Links with:

Safe and Well – Supporting people in poverty

Active and Involved – Community cohesion

Opportunity and Prosperity – Equality of opportunity for all

Connected and Smart – Importance of digital literacy

Corporate plan has referred to the Tackling Poverty Strategy to address the inequalities in our city and make life fairer for those affected by poverty and the cost of living and the consequences of living in debt.

8. Financial Implications

Most of the recommendation try to utilise existing resources and build on networking, in-house trainings and partnership work.

Some of the recommended action would require investment like the

- Low Income Family Software (£32000 per year)
- Poverty Truth Commission – need the continuation of the Tackling Poverty Project Manager Level 9 role

- Cost of Living booklet 6month or yearly addition (£3000)

9. Legal Implications

This is not applicable.

10. People Implications

This strategy supports all residents of the city especially those that are most vulnerable

11. Equalities Impact Assessment

The priorities outlined in the strategy are based upon the needs of Southend's communities. This has included feedback from consultation and needs analyses.

13. Risk Assessment

Any Corporate risks shall be identified and monitored alongside the council's priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan through the council's Corporate Risk Register.

14. Value for Money

The council proactively benchmarks its performance and spend against its statistical and geographical neighbours, to ensure it is providing value for money.

15. Community Safety Implications

Not applicable

17. Appendices:

17.1 Appendix 1: Engagement result

Residents who completed the household survey and considered themselves in poverty said:

63.4% of people, said there was a time when support was needed and not available People are looking for the following support the most:

- Gas, electricity, fuel
- Housing and rent
- Food support
- Mental health and physical health support
- Benefit, debt and budgeting advice
- Family and childcare support

66.1 % have used foodbanks (only 42% people over 55 years used foodbanks)
Reduction of income caused by

- Sickness /Ill health
- Insecure job & Job loss
- Family breakdown or Domestic Abuse

35.5 % of people 's main income is work (59.7% on Benefit, 4.8 % Pension)
67.2 % Single, divorced, widowed

78.3 % have children

35 % have caring responsibilities

26.1 % are from BAME background

73.5% of people said they would consider stopping their home broadband or entertainment package due to the Cost-of-Living crisis

30% use mobile data and libraries as their main source of internet

People in poverty who engaged with our household survey:

- 40% live in a rented accommodation
- 36.7% renting from Housing Association or live in a council house
- 14.2% own home with mortgage
- 5.8% homeless or sofa surfing
- 2.5% own home with outright
- 0.8% living with parents

54.2 % of people who considered themselves in poverty in our household survey have a long-standing illness, with this number increasing with age; 96% of residents aged over 55, who considered themselves to be in poverty, have long standing illnesses

17.2 Appendix 2: Draft Strategy

