

Tackling Poverty Action Plan

Priority 1: Emergency Support

Immediate Priorities – Year 1			
Aim	Activity	Why	Progress on immediate priorities
Food Justice Plan – Ensuring people have access to healthy food	1.1 Ensure foodbanks in Suffolk have access to sufficient food to meet current needs as we recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.	Foodbank usage remains high and increases in the cost-of-living mean foodbank demand is likely to remain high or grow further. With more people, struggling donations to foodbanks are likely to also fall.	<p>To help ensure a constant supply of food to foodbanks during the Covid-19 pandemic, Suffolk County Council have commissioned FareShare who have so far provided over 326,000 tonnes of food to Suffolk foodbanks.</p> <p>Foodbank and hardship officer in post.</p> <p>Suffolk County Council also holds an emergency food supply.</p> <p>Current need is continually reviewed.</p>
	1.2 Explore ways to make more fresh food available via foodbanks and pop-up shops and other means.	Food from food banks is often long-life (e.g., tinned food) which can be of lesser nutritional value. Evidence shows that healthier food is more expensive per calorie than unhealthy food ⁱ . Consultation feedback shows that people want healthy meals, but that cost is a major barrier.	<p>Exploratory work with National Farmers Union is underway to ensure fresh food is not left in the ground but instead supplied to foodbanks.</p> <p>Community Pantries in Lowestoft.</p> <p>Prior to the revised Local Welfare Assistance Scheme which went live in</p>

			October 2022 there was a trial with Pink Orange to make healthy meal kits available.
	1.3 Recruit a caseworker who can provide support and advice foodbank clients where the foodbank does not offer this service.	Whilst some foodbanks provide advice and guidance as well as food, others are not able to, meaning that people receive short term help in the form of food but limited support to tackle the root causes of their situation.	Recruitment to the role is being considered along with alternative ways of providing support to foodbank users.
Raising awareness of poverty issues and the available support	1.4 Put in place a regular programme of communications to ensure people are aware of the available support.	Our consultation highlighted a limited knowledge of hardship support. There is a need to raise awareness of the range of support organisations and ensure this is communicated regularly to make sure people know where to go in the event of needing support and to try and help people access support before they hit crisis.	<p>Regular communication is sent out to foodbanks including a 'Guide to Services' leaflet which highlights the support available to people in Suffolk.</p> <p>Targeted promotion of the Household Support Grant takes place regularly.</p> <p>Leaflets to promote services that can help people struggling with the Cost of Living have been developed and 75,000 have been distributed to VCSE organisations, schools, GPs, foodbanks, parish councils and frontline professionals.</p> <p>New webpage created includes support information and signposting www.suffolk.gov.uk/CostOfLiving</p> <p>Suffolk Infolink holds information about a wide range of services tackling financial</p>

			hardship. See http://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/costofliving
Support to people in crisis	1.5 Continue to underwrite the Suffolk Advice and Support Service (SASS) for 2022/23.	Calls to the service are now at the highest levels we have ever seen, with the impact of fuel cost rises, and cost of living meaning many more people are now struggling. Consultation feedback shows that awareness of support is low.	Agreement gained from Suffolk Public Sector Leaders to underwrite LWAS and SASS cost up to £1 million. Current services ran until September 2022 when a new model/service commenced to allow self-referrals and an easier pathway. Funding to support these activities has been secured from Suffolk Public Sector Leaders
	1.6 Continue to underwrite the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme (LWAS) for 2022/23.	Demand for this scheme is now at the highest levels we have ever seen due to the impact of cost-of-living rises. Consultation feedback and research evidence shows that people on low incomes are unlikely to have sufficient income to build up any savings and are at risk of being pushed into debt in the event of an emergency. Schemes like LWAS (Local Welfare Assistance Scheme) can help to prevent people hold falling into debt and reduce the likelihood of further issues such as being evicted and becoming homeless.	
Further recommendations			
1. We recommend undertaking research to understand whether there is sufficient emergency food support for vulnerable groups, as consultation feedback suggests there may potentially be a gap in provision across the county for some groups.			
2. We recommend listening to local people with experience of poverty about how we can improve access to services.			

Priority 2: Increasing Incomes, Reducing Costs

Immediate Priorities - Year 1			
Aim	Activity	Why	Progress on immediate priorities
Poverty proofing services	2.1 Run a pilot trial of the Poverty Proofing the School Day initiative.	Consultation feedback highlighted the costs of school as being a major challenge for many parents on low incomes to afford. Cost issues can also lead to children suffering the effects of stigma, for example through bullying. This programme has been shown to reduce/remove cost barriers, increase participation in school and after-school activities, reduce school-related financial pressures for families and increase uptake of entitlements and financial supports ⁱⁱ .	A pilot trial is taking place with 7 schools between November 2022 and July 2023
Food Justice Plan – Ensuring people have access to healthy food	2.2 Increase the promotion, uptake, and use of Healthy Start Vouchers.	Suffolk is on a par with the national average on uptake of this scheme, however, uptake nationally is low so there are a lot of people who could benefit from this scheme who are not already doing so. Research has shown that Healthy Start vouchers can increase the quantity and range of fruit and vegetables used and improved the quality of family diets ⁱⁱⁱ .	<p>Early promotional efforts have seen significant increases in take up.</p> <p>Public Health are working with Sustain and Health Visiting teams to promote the scheme as well as identify barriers to take up</p> <p>Healthy Start Leaflets are now being distributed.</p>
	2.3 Maintain high take-up of Free School Meals and where possible, further increase it.	Eligibility for free school meals continues to grow so whilst Suffolk has a high take-up currently, we need to ensure that this continues to maximise the number of children benefitting from meals.	SCC continue to raise awareness of the Free Schools Meal offer. As a result, we have seen an increase in people coming forward.

	2.4 Lobby government to expand entitlement to Free School Meals so all families living in poverty have access to it.	Under the current criteria for Free School Meals, many people who are living in financial hardship do not currently qualify for them ^{iv} .	Changes in Government have made the timing of this lobbying challenging but will seek to undertake this should the Autumn Statement not address this point.
Improving financial resilience	2.5 Rollout use of the LIFT (Low Income Family Tracker) dashboard across district and borough councils to provide better targeted support.	People typically only seek help once they hit crisis. The LIFT dashboard is a proven tool that can help get targeted support to people before crisis hits.	East Suffolk have piloted the LIFT dashboard for 2 years. Awaiting the addition of DWP data to be able to roll this out further across Suffolk.
Improving financial resilience	2.6 Put in place a regular programme of communications to promote take up of financial support.	Feedback from VCSE organisations shows that many people are not benefitting from support they are eligible for either due to a lack of awareness or due to the stigma of asking for help.	<p>SCC are using their assets e.g., Suffolk Library Service, by training their staff teams on Money, Advice and Pensions. This will help people to feel more confident about their money.</p> <p>Warm Handover has identified numerous organisations in local communities who also provide debt advice, work is underway to collate and join up the various offers, whilst utilising opportunities through projects such as the Rural Coffee Caravan.</p>
	2.7 Increase awareness of and access to local credit unions.	Awareness of credit union services is not widespread. Methods such as employer partnerships to enable payroll saving may be a good option to support low-income households to be able to access affordable credit and increase financial resilience in the longer term.	Suffolk County Council's Adult & Community Services directorate work with Credit Unions to support vulnerable people. Exploration work is underway to expand this to a wider population group.

Work	2.8 Increase the number of employers in Suffolk that meet the definition of ‘good work’.	Pay in Suffolk has been lower than the national average for some time meaning many Suffolk workers are less able to meet essential living costs, and will be less able to cope with cost of living pressures. Consultation feedback and research evidence also shows the importance of secure work, flexible work, healthy workplaces, and employee voice.	The Suffolk Health & Wellbeing Board “Best Work and Health” group are working with the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce and the Local Enterprise Partnership to roll out Healthy Workplace awards and standards.
Further recommendations			
1. Research and consultation feedback suggests that access to debt advice and income maximisation services is not reaching everyone, we recommend increasing the promotion and availability.			
2. We recommend focusing on maximising the available national funding opportunities to increase the number of Suffolk residents able to access support to improve their home energy efficiency.			
3. We recommend that activities relating to the transition to Net Zero and the Climate Change Action Plan are poverty informed. The transition to Net Zero needs to be fair and any action taken should not disenfranchise or disadvantage people on low incomes			
4. People on low incomes often face a poverty premium on services such as fuel, banking and insurance. In Suffolk this means people can pay up to £473 more because of their circumstances ^{vi} . We recommend where possible, at a local level to reduce the impact of the poverty premium by reviewing local policies and utilising the opportunities within the Equality Act 2010. ^{vii}			
5. We recommend maximising the opportunity, promotion and accessibility of employment support and skills training programmes to tackling poverty.			
6. We recommend looking at ways to increase access to affordable credit, with local credit unions, increase awareness of the support available to help people manage their finances more confidently.			
7. To address in-work poverty we recommend exploring local initiatives aimed at maximising the income of those in poverty ^{viii} .			
8. We recommend exploring options to support lone parents experiencing poverty.			

Priority 3: Wellbeing & Life Chances

Immediate Priorities – Year 1			
Aim	Activity	Why	Progress on immediate priorities
Increasing opportunities for children and young people	3.1 Deliver a cultural programme in Suffolk Libraries focused on children’s literacy.	Literacy is crucial to children’s development and life chances. Consultation feedback highlighted the importance of positive enrichment activities such as arts and culture for children.	<p>Suffolk Public Sector Leaders have funded the National Literacy Trust programme working closely with Suffolk Library Service, Suffolk Mind and Home Start.</p> <p>Suffolk Libraries Service are supporting schools with a tailored schools offer. Many libraries already connect to their local schools with regular school visits.</p>
Food Justice Plan – Ensuring people have access to healthy food	3.2 Continue to develop the Holiday Activities & Food programme.	Children from low-income households are less likely to access organised out-of-school activities, experience holiday hunger and social isolation. National and local evidence shows that this programmes successfully tackles this issues.	The Department for Education funded Holiday Activities & Food programme has been running since 2019. This provides free school holiday activities and food for children eligible for Free School Meals. During 2021, 9,747 children accessed activities and 44,839 meals were provided across the Easter, Summer, and Christmas school holidays.
Mitigating the impacts of poverty	3.3 Investing £2.5m to tackle the mental health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic ^{ix} .	People with mental health issues are more at risk of falling into poverty. People in poverty are more at risk of developing mental health problems. Mental health issues make it harder for people to improve their circumstances and consultation feedback highlighted the importance of supporting mental health needs to help people escape poverty.	Public Health and Communities have developed a Public Mental Health offer which focusses on a universal wellbeing offer, examples of work already in place include: Suffolk Says Thanks ; Take 5 (5 ways of wellbeing programme for schools and the general public); Arts Libraries and

			<p>Museums Wellbeing project; Open space (targeting men); Annual wellbeing conference/webinar this year's focus is on sleep; Promotion of Suffolk Needs met; Theatre in Education; Grass roots localised coffee morning; Commissioning Suffolk VASP (Voluntary and Statutory Partnership) for Mental Health to share information and promote local offers.</p> <p>The programme is also focusing some of the funding specifically to supporting people who are experiencing poverty.</p>
Addressing barriers to escaping poverty	3.4 Pilot trial a grant programme in partnership with VCSE partner organisations that can provide small grants to individuals to help overcome barriers to escaping poverty.	A recurring theme in our consultation feedback was around how people often faced barriers to improving their circumstances, trapping them in poverty through no fault of their own. In many cases the types of barriers we heard about were ones that could easily be overcome at a small cost but one that was out of reach of the person. This action aims to test and evaluate ways we can help individuals overcome barriers to escaping poverty.	This programme is currently in development with Suffolk Community Foundation
Tackling poverty	3.5 Set up a Tackling Poverty funding programme to test innovative approaches to tackling poverty.	Whilst some aspects of work to tackle poverty has a robust evidence base, in some areas evidence is limited. This programme aims to fund and work closely with a small number of VCSE partners to identify areas where evidence is limited and fund work to test innovative approaches and build an evidence base to inform future poverty work.	The Tackling Poverty Innovation Fund closed to applications in October, with 4 projects chosen for funding.
Further Recommendations			

1. We recommend maximising any investments made as part of the Governments Levelling Up White Paper, which identifies Suffolk as one of the new Education Investment Areas
2. We recommend building on the success of the Suffolk Holiday Activities & Food programme by increasing the range of activities available for disadvantaged children and young people
3. We recommend increasing efforts to improve school readiness. which will help ensure children are well placed to succeed in education and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.
4. We recommend continuing to build on current work focused on addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences
5. We recommend identifying more opportunities to help groups at greater risk of poverty, such as care leavers, disabled people, and lone parents.
6. We recommend exploring what local actions support people in debt or at risk of falling into debt because of gambling.

Priority 4: Preventing Poverty

Immediate Priorities			
Aim	Activity	Why	Progress on immediate priorities
Increasing opportunities for children and young people	4.1 Fund a community development role within Community Action Suffolk to support and grow the community-led early years sector.	The Covid-19 pandemic impacted on the availability of community-led early years provision such as Parent & Child groups and our Childcare Sufficiency Assessment for Suffolk identifies a need for more early years provision in certain parts of the county ^x . Parent and Child groups support child development and school readiness and can support parental mental health and reduce social isolation.	The Parent and Child Groups support programme is now running.
Involving people with lived experience of poverty	4.2 Set up an Experts by Experience initiative that brings together people with experience of poverty with local decision makers to look issues faced by people living	Consultation feedback with people with lived experience demonstrated the challenges people deal with daily but also showed the resilience of many people and that they had their own ideas on how to tackle poverty. Evidence shows that involving people with lived experience can help	SCC have commissioned Healthwatch Suffolk to undertake an in-depth coproduction initiative working with people with lived experience, this is due to start within the next few months.

	in poverty and then identify and implement solutions that will improve people's lives.	identify solutions to issues which can help make services and activities work better for the people who use them as well as providing other benefits such improving social relationships, increasing people's self-esteem, confidence, and wellbeing, and improving the knowledge and expertise of staff who work with those people.	Suffolk Public Sector Leaders have supported this approach.
Food Justice Plan – Ensure people have access to healthy food	4.3 Write to the government asking them to enshrine the existing commitment to UN Sustainable Development Goal 2 into domestic legislation.	Goal two is 'End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture' ^{xi} . This commitment is not currently enshrined in domestic legislation.	Councillor Matthew Hicks sent a letter to national government (March 2022)
Food Justice Plan – Ensure people have access to healthy food	4.4 Capture learning from the Covid-19 pandemic response to ensure there is a plan to ensure access to healthy food in the event of another emergency.	The Covid-19 pandemic showed the importance of ensuring that people had access to healthy food in an emergency. The learning from this needs to be captured to ensure that it can inform future emergency planning.	Suffolk County Council have a supply of emergency food provisions available
Food Justice Plan – Ensure people have access to healthy food	4.5 Conduct the initial scoping and research into the potential to set up a Local Food Partnership using the Sustainable Food Place model.	Most of the action taken to tackle food poverty deals with immediate crisis support but many people want to look at ways to prevent people needing emergency food aid in the first place. To do this then a strategic approach to the local food ecosystem is necessary. The Local Food Partnership/ Sustainable Food Place model is a well-used system approach that seeks to tackle the social, economic, and environmental aspects of food locally to ensure that everyone has access to healthy and sustainable food.	Looking to scope out the sustainable food model for Suffolk to deliver the first elements within the final quarter or 22/23

Improving financial resilience	4.6 Work with schools, the VCSE sector and parents to ensure all children have access to good quality financial education	Consultation feedback highlighted that the quality of financial education for children is hit and miss. Our work with young people highlighted this as a specific issue that they wanted to see tackled.	Working with VCSE partners to build a range of programmes and outreach to work with schools and youth organisations from year 6 upwards. Initial delivery expected final quarter of 22/23
Poverty informed practice	4.7 Develop poverty awareness training sessions and materials and roll out training for public sector organisations and councillors	A need was identified in the consultation by many respondents for greater awareness of poverty issues and the impacts it has on people.	Strategy awareness has been delivered through network presentations to date.
Poverty informed practice	4.8 Add the socio-economic duty in the Equality Act 2010 into the council's Equality Impact Assessment process so consideration is given to inequalities resulting from socio-economic disadvantage.	By adding the socio-economic duty to our Equality Impact Assessment process, it will mean that when considering changes to services or developing new projects or services, that inequalities that result from socio-economic disadvantage will be given consideration in the design of services or projects.	This has been completed
Poverty informed practice	4.9 Review internal systems and processes on key services that support people on low incomes to ensure that they provide timely and easy access to support and do not inadvertently cause issues.	Our consultation feedback highlighted examples where systems and processes can inadvertently get in the way of people being able to access timely support in an easy manner. Research shows that people in poverty can struggle to access services due to the day-to-day stresses of surviving on a low income and that as a result they often do not.	

Poverty informed practice	4.10 Ensure that the next contract for provision of library services builds on existing services that tackle poverty	Libraries already offer a range of services that directly contribute to tackling poverty in Suffolk across all four of our priority areas. As one of the few council services that are located across Suffolk, the library service can play an important role in tackling poverty.	
Lobbying and Advocacy	4.11 Develop an 'ask' of national government, identifying specific areas that require national government intervention	Whilst there are many things we can do locally; we have limited powers in some of the most important aspects of poverty reduction so we will need to advocate with the government.	Letters have been sent to national government requesting Department for Work & Pensions data permissions to support the LIFT programme.

Further recommendations

1. We recommend investigating current and future investment needs in the local credit union sector.
2. We recommend delivering poverty awareness training and making it widely available to public, private and VCSE sectors.
3. Evidence suggests that community initiatives involving food such as community growing schemes, cooking skills and events such as lunch clubs can contribute to tackling poverty and reducing social isolation. We would recommend that mapping of these types of initiatives is conducted to identify where there may be benefit in supporting more of these types of community food initiatives.
4. We recommend exploring opportunities to maximise social value within procurement practices and ensuring planning policies are poverty informed
5. We recommend expanding Asset Based Community Development programmes that support and empower communities to identify and tackle local needs.
6. We recommend exploring opportunities to increase affordable and energy efficient homes in Suffolk.
7. We recommend identifying additional opportunities to improve the financial knowledge and confidence of adults to prevent people falling into financial insecurity in the future. ^{xii} .

References

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^{ix} Suffolk County Council. Annual Public Health Report focuses on Mental Health impact of Covid-19. Published 02 December 2021. Accessed 20 April 2022. <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/show/annual-public-health-report-focuses-on-mental-health-impact-of-covid-19>

^x Suffolk County Council. Childcare Sufficiency Assessment December 2020-December 2021. Published December 2020. Accessed 20 April 2022. <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/Children-families-and-learning/childcare-information-and-support-for-parents-and-providers/2021-03-01-Childcare-Sufficiency-Assessment-Suffolk-County-Council.pdf>

^{xi} United Nations. Sustainable Development Goals. Accessed 20 April 2022. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal2>

^{xii} Financial Capability Strategy for the UK. Key Statistics on UK Financial Capability. Published 2018. Accessed 08 April 2022. <https://www.fincap.org.uk/en/articles/key-statistics-on-uk-financial-capability>

Version Control

Version	Date	Summary of changes
1.0	24/05/2022	First version
1.1	09/11/2022	Progress updates to Actions 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 4.1, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7.