

# Anti-Poverty Strategy Annual Report 2020/21

## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on delivery of key actions in the Council's third Anti-Poverty Strategy, which covers the period 2020-2023. During 2020/21 the Council has delivered a range of planned actions to help address a range of issues associated with poverty, including low pay, debt, food poverty, fuel poverty, digital inclusion, skills, employment, housing affordability, homelessness, and poor health outcomes.
- 1.2 The report also provides a summary of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Council's activities to address poverty. The Council helped support a range of emergency activity in response to the pandemic, including local food hubs to address food shortages, emergency fuel vouchers, business support grants, and emergency accommodation for homeless people. While many anti-poverty activities were able to continue as planned during 2020/21, a number of actions in the Anti-Poverty Strategy had to be postponed or delivered through alternative means due to national Covid-19 restrictions.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Council has produced two previous Anti-Poverty Strategies covering the periods from 2014-2017 and 2017-2020. The Council produced a revised and updated Anti-Poverty Strategy for the period from April 2020 to March 2023, which was approved by the Executive Councillor for Communities on 3 July 2020.
- 2.2 The revised strategy sets out an evolution of the Council's broad strategic approach to tackling poverty. It sets out three underpinning themes for the Council's future approach:
  1. Combining our ongoing efforts to address the effects of poverty, with a further focus on preventative work (often in partnership with other organisations) to address some of the root causes of poverty.
  2. Balancing direct Council service delivery, with partnership-working and influencing and lobbying activity where this will have greater impact.
  3. Building the capacity and resilience of residents and communities and facilitating community action.
- 2.3 These three themes set are woven through the five revised strategic objectives for the Anti-Poverty Strategy, which are:

1. Helping people on low incomes to maximise their income and minimise their costs
2. Strengthening families and communities, including supporting groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty
3. Promoting an inclusive economy, by raising skills and improving access to a range of employment opportunities for people on low incomes
4. Addressing the high cost of housing, improve housing conditions, and reduce homelessness
5. Improving health outcomes for people on low incomes

2.4 The Anti-Poverty Strategy includes an action plan, which sets out 58 key activities that the Council currently plans to undertake to help achieve each of the objectives. The action plan is intended to be a 'living document' that will be regularly reviewed and updated. It is anticipated that new activities may be identified over the course of the strategy period to respond to emerging issues relating to poverty in the city.

### **3.0 Impact of Covid-19 on delivery of the Anti-Poverty Strategy**

3.1 The Anti-Poverty Strategy recognised that in 2020 and 2021 the national lockdowns and restrictions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic would exacerbate poverty for people in Cambridge who were already on low incomes, and also lead to many more people experiencing economic hardship as a result of furloughing, redundancy or difficulty finding self-employed work.

3.2 During 2020/21 the Council has taken a range of unplanned emergency actions in partnership with local partners and communities to address the immediate impacts of Covid-19, including a range of actions to support people in poverty or on low incomes. These included:

- Facilitating a network of community resilience mutual aid groups and providing support for the most vulnerable.
- Providing a central food preparation hub and providing staff and funding to support the establishment of 8 Food Hubs around Cambridge by local community groups during the lockdown periods to collect and distribute food donations to households experiencing food shortages. In 2020, the Food Hubs received nearly 18,000 visitors who collected over 110 tonnes of food. Volunteers from the hubs reached out to over 1,200 households and delivered over 8,000 meals.

- Using the Council's Anti-Poverty Responsive Budget to fund activity to meet emergency needs, including £15,000 to Cambridge Sustainable Food for work to address food poverty and £15,000 to Cambridge Online for digital devices and data packages for low income families who were struggling to access education and services online during the pandemic.
  - Securing funding for an emergency fuel voucher scheme with Cambridge City Foodbank. Since June 2020, 276 vouchers with a value of almost £20,000 have been given to people in financial crisis due to the pandemic who were unable to top-up their pre-pay meter. As well as being on low-incomes, many of these people are likely to have disabilities or physical or mental health conditions that necessitate a warm home.
  - Ensuring that all homeless people in Cambridge (316 people) were offered accommodation under the "everyone in" programme.
  - Administering nearly £50m of Government-funded business support grants to local businesses.
  - Developing a flexible funding approach to work with voluntary and community groups funded through the Council's Community Grants. Officers worked with groups to review grant purposes and delivery to remain as supportive as possible during this unprecedented year.
- 3.3 As shown by the updates provided in section 4.0 below, during 2020/21 the Council has also delivered a range of specific actions and activities identified in the Anti-Poverty Strategy as planned. However, it was not possible to deliver some of the specific actions identified in the Anti-Poverty Strategy action plan due to Government restrictions on face-to-face service provision as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, while others were delivered through alternative means, including online events, or telephone and online support. Where this was this case, details are provided in section 4.0 below under the relevant objectives of the strategy.

## **4.0 Progress during 2020/21**

- 4.1 This section of the report provides a summary of the key actions delivered during the year 2020/21 under each of the 5 objectives of the Council's current Anti-Poverty Strategy.

### **Objective 1 - Helping people on low incomes to maximise their income and minimise their costs**

- 4.2 Key activities which helped deliver this strategic objective during 2020/21 included:
- Continuing to pay all directly employed Council staff at least the Real Living Wage, with a supplement to bring pay rates for the lowest paid staff up to £10

per hour. All agency workers continue to be paid the Real Living Wage after 4 weeks, and all Council tenders and contracts require contractors to meet the Living Wage Foundation's criteria (any staff employed by contractors who work for a minimum of 2 hours or more for 8 consecutive weeks on Council premises are paid the Real Living Wage).

- Running a campaign to encourage local employers to pay their staff the Real Living Wage. The number of Cambridge employers accredited with the Living Wage Foundation increased from 74 in March 2020 to 79 in March 2021. The Council provided direct support to 2 of the Cambridge employers that became accredited.
- Supporting benefits claimants to receive their full benefits entitlement. In 2020/21, the Council awarded £31m in Housing Benefit and provided £8m million in Council Tax Support, including £825,000 of additional Council Tax Hardship Fund payments.
- Funding voluntary and community groups to provide a range of activities to help reduce social or economic inequality. In 2020-21, the Council provided a total of £1,100,000 through its Community Grants to over 80 groups to provide over 100 services and activities.
- Funding Citizen's Advice to provide a specialist adviser at Cambridge Jobcentre to deliver Personal Budgeting Support for Universal Credit claimants. The adviser continued to support new Universal Credit claimants by telephone, email and letters during the period when coronavirus restrictions prevented face-to-face sessions.
- Employing 2 Financial Inclusion Officers to support Council tenants and other residents with low incomes who are in financial crisis. The officers helped residents to maximise their incomes and reduce outgoings, offered debt advice and triaged referrals to other agencies such as Cambridge Citizens' Advice.
- Supporting 127 residents who were struggling with energy and water costs to have energy efficiency improvements installed. Although home visits were not possible during the coronavirus pandemic, the Council's Home Energy Officer provided assistance by email, phone and text and through community hubs, including many referrals for emergency fuel vouchers.
- Partnering with Peterborough Environment City Trust (PECT) on a fuel poverty project funded by UK Power Networks' Power Partners programme. Since January 2021, PECT has been providing energy efficiency support to vulnerable Cambridge residents experiencing fuel poverty and the City Council is acting as the main referral partner and is promoting the support to Council tenants and benefits claimants.
- Supporting digitally excluded Council tenants and leaseholders by:
  - Loaning 40 tablets with pre-loaded data to tenants, leaseholders and sheltered housing tenants.

- Providing free wifi for use by tenants in the community room at Hanover and Princess Court.
- Facilitating the roll-out of fibre optic broadband by commercial companies to Council homes, including a heavily discounted social rate broadband package.
- Working with the Cambridgeshire Digital Partnership, which brings together local voluntary and community groups providing support to digitally excluded households. The Council helped fund a series of events held by the Partnership during Get Online week in October 2020.
- Funding local voluntary and community groups to deliver a range of digital inclusion activity, including:
  - £35,000 funding from the Anti-Poverty and Community Grant funds for digital devices and data packages to low-income families who were struggling to access education and services online during the Covid-19 pandemic.
  - £40,000 funding from the Community Grants to Cambridge Online to deliver a range of activity including digital inclusion clubs, digital skills training, partnership development and help filling in online forms.
  - £12,000 from the Community Grants to CHS Group to provide personalised digital inclusion support for people moving onto Universal Credit and £4,000 to the Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service for digital training and support for voluntary and community groups.

4.3 Two actions under this objective were difficult to deliver due to Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions during 2020/21:

- Longer-term work to create a food redistribution hub with the Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance was delayed by the pandemic and will be progressed during 2021/22. During 2020, a temporary food redistribution hub was created at the Council's Buchan Street Neighbourhood Centre.
- The dedicated Advice Hub, which provides a space for voluntary and community groups to provide debt, financial and rent advice and help to access the internet, was closed during 2020/21 due to Covid-19 restrictions on face-to-face meetings. During this period, Citizens Advice and Cambridge Online provided advice and support to residents using different means, including online and telephone support. The Advice Hub is currently being reviewed as part of a wider review of the Council's Customer Service Centre.

## **Objective 2 - Strengthening families and communities, including supporting groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty**

4.4 Key activities which helped deliver this strategic objective during 2020/21 included:

- Encouraging residents to volunteer in local communities by holding the Mayor's Volunteer for Cambridge (V4C) awards. Over 80 awards were made across the 4 categories of Young Person, Individual, Voluntary Group and Business, with a particular focus on volunteering in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Delivering the annual programme of events to celebrate diversity and promote community cohesion online rather than face-to-face. An estimated 18,000 people participated in a range of events delivered in partnership with local equality and diversity organisations to mark different international events, including Black History Month, Disability History Month, Holocaust Memorial Day, South Asian History Month, Women's History Month.
- Producing a first draft of the Area Action Plan (AAP) for the regeneration of the North East Cambridge area, which includes policies on improving physical and social links between new developments and neighbouring disadvantaged communities.

4.5 Two actions under this objective were difficult to deliver due to Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions during 2020/21:

- The planned community environment days could not be held due to Covid-19 restrictions on gatherings, but the Council appointed an Engagement, Education and Enforcement Officer for 12 months in response to increased fly-tipping during the pandemic. The aim of the role is to engage with communities, encourage people to recycle or dispose of waste correctly, and encourage a sense of community pride.
- Many events which help increase community pride and cohesion, such as Arbury Carnival, Chesterton Festival, Cherry Hinton Festival and the Big Weekend, could not be held due to Covid-19 restrictions. However, the Council supported and facilitated alternative activities to mark a number of these events, including:
  - Producing creative packs to mark the Big Weekend and the Folk Festival, which were distributed via the community resilience networks and network of food hubs. The Council distributed 500 packs every two weeks in a project set to run for 12 weeks.
  - Taking part in a 4-day Radio 2 show to celebrate all the artists that would have been playing at the Folk Festival.

- Becoming a participating city in Window Wanderland, which provides resources for communities to set up their own window displays and galleries, with the aim of connecting people and communities and reducing social isolation.

### **Objective 3 - Promoting an inclusive economy, by raising skills and improving access to a range of employment opportunities for people on low incomes**

#### 4.6 Key activities which helped deliver this strategic objective during 2020/21 included:

- Funding Tempo to expand the existing time-credit scheme to support residents on low incomes in Abbey, Arbury, East Chesterton, Kings Hedges and Trumpington to volunteer and engage in community activities. Tempo provided support to community groups involved in the project, including e-learning courses, a series of online digital forums and local network events. Groups were supported to promote their volunteer needs around Covid-19 and encourage people to volunteer to reduce their social isolation.
- Securing £1.6m in funding and in-kind support to implement and deliver the next stage of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Region of Learning (previously called the Culture Card project). The project aims to repurpose the existing library card as a 'smart' universal passport to learning. The funding will allow the project to engage a minimum of 1,070 disadvantaged young people aged 15-24 across the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) area in a pilot scheme. The pilot scheme will provide basic skills training, career guidance, transferable skills assessment, and access to additional learning, work experience, mentoring and employment.
- Contributing funding and acting as a key partner in the Greater Cambridge Partnership, which has supported 700 people into apprenticeships in local growth sectors through a number of skills-related interventions. The GCP contracted with Form the Future in partnership with Cambridge Regional College (CRC) to deliver an Apprenticeship Service from 2019 to 2021. In February 2021 the GCP awarded a new £2m, 4-year contract to Form the Future (in partnership with CRC) to deliver an extended Apprenticeship Service. In 2020 GCP also invested £200,000 to help launch a new training centre to support people who are at high risk of not getting into work, such as those with special educational needs, mental health issues and homelessness.
- Work with partners in the Greater Cambridge Partnership and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) to ensure delivery of planned investment in transport infrastructure that improves connectivity between key employment locations and more deprived areas of the city. In November 2020

the new Abbey-Chesterton Bridge was lifted into place, which will form a key part of the Chisholm Trail walking and cycling route.

- Producing several planning policy documents for the proposed development and regeneration of the North East Cambridge area, which include a focus on ensuring that development benefits neighbouring disadvantaged communities by maximising local employment, skills and training opportunities. Anti-Poverty and Community Safety topic papers are being produced as part of the evidence base for the AAP, and the emerging Relocation Strategy for the area seeks to retain existing industrial jobs.

#### **Objective 4 - Addressing the high cost of housing, improve housing conditions, and reduce homelessness**

4.7 Key activities which helped deliver this strategic objective during 2020/21 included:

- Developing new Council homes for rent. Development of 526 new Council homes started on site by March 2021, meeting this target a year ahead of schedule. 56 new Council homes were completed during 2020/21 and a further 14 modular homes were completed during the year.
- Approving construction of a further 1,000 new Council homes in September 2020. These homes will be built to Passivhaus standards from 2021 (where technically feasible and subject to funding) and the Council will target net zero carbon emissions standards from 2030. Work completed with consultants Buro Happold assessed the running costs for Council tenants associated with meeting these sustainability standards.
- Working with developers through the planning process to enable the delivery of new affordable homes. During 2020/21 111 affordable homes were delivered by developers other than the Council on strategic growth sites.
- Carrying out consultation on a new proposed Affordable Rents policy to be annexed to the Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy, aimed at keeping Affordable Rents for social housing in Cambridge at or below 60% of market rents or at/below Local Housing Allowance Rates, whichever is the lower.
- Securing just over £2 million funding from the Government's Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery 1b scheme. The funding aims to support low income households living in energy inefficient homes. Cambridge City Council is the lead authority on the project, which will support the installation of energy efficiency measures in homes across Cambridgeshire up until Autumn 2021.
- Approving a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for 2021-2026 in January 2021. The strategy identifies a range of factors that cause homelessness and rough sleeping, including a strong correlation between

mental health and substance abuse issues and repeat homelessness and rough sleeping. The strategy sets out a series of actions intended to improve outcomes for these groups of people. The strategy also identifies a strong correlation between economic disadvantage and access to good housing, and it pledges to build on an existing range of financial support measures such as Housing Benefit Plus.

- Reviewing the Council's Housing Benefit Plus scheme, which provides a top-up allowance to enable more homeless people to bridge the gap between Housing Benefit levels and private-sector rents, together with employment and income maximisation advice. The review led to an increase in the maximum Housing Benefit Plus allowance, although the uprating of the Local Housing Allowance by Government in April 2020 has meant that the Housing Benefit Plus top-up allowance has been needed in fewer cases. In 2020/21, 34 Housing benefit plus cases were approved.
- Introducing a Housing First pilot programme to provide self-contained accommodation and support for rough sleepers who are not suited to hostel accommodation. The pilot met its targets for 2020/21 by securing tenants for the 11 'Housing First 1' properties and the first 4 'Housing First 2' properties (which provide an onsite caretaker for every two tenants).
- Supporting the delivery of 16 new modular housing units on council land for the homeless, working with partners at Hill and Jimmy's to provide good quality self-contained accommodation.
- Embedding improvements identified in the Council's Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation into service delivery. The council has continued to analyse feedback from customers and partner organisations and undertook 31 case audits in 2020.

#### **Objective 5 - Improving health outcomes for people on low incomes**

4.8 It was particularly challenging to deliver the key actions identified in the Anti-Poverty Strategy relating to this strategic objective in 2020/21 due to Covid-19 restrictions. Key activities which the Council was not able to deliver, or had to deliver in alternative ways, included:

- Funding Citizen's Advice annually as part of the Community Grants to provide outreach advice services, including for people experiencing anxiety and stress due to financial issues. During the first 6 months of the year (April-September 2020) Citizen's Advice provided advice to 458 people, with benefits, debt, employment, housing, and financial capability being amongst the most common issues. Most of this advice was provided by telephone or online, as coronavirus restrictions prevented face-to-face sessions in outreach locations.
- Providing a programme of free lunches with local partners for low income families during school holidays in Council and community venues was not

possible due to Covid-19 restrictions. Instead, we supported Cambridge Sustainable Food to deliver meals directly to single households and families throughout the lockdown period.

- Funding community groups to deliver cookery skills workshops for low income households was not possible due to coronavirus restrictions, but a range of cookery skills videos and instructions were posted online, along with a demonstration on how to cook some South Asian dishes.
- Providing free swimming sessions for low income families with children, and free and discounted swimming sessions for young people. It was not possible to provide these sessions for families with children and young people during 2020/21, because Council swimming pools were closed for significant periods due to Government Covid-19 guidance. In the limited period when swimming pools were open, restrictions on numbers of swimmers and sessions meant it was not possible to provide the free and discounted sessions.
- Providing additional swimming teachers to support school swimming lessons for pupils from low income households at Abbey Pool, Kings Hedges Learner Pool and Parkside Pool. In the periods when the swimming pools were open, no schools attended the pools for swimming lessons, so it was not possible to provide this additional support.
- Providing monthly free health sessions for women, including BAME women, was not possible due to Covid-19 restrictions on face-to-face gatherings, but the Council helped provide support, information, and signposting for over 90 families and individuals in the South Asian and other minority ethnic communities. Support included food support, fuel vouchers, shopping vouchers and small household items from Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum (CECF), Karim Foundation and Cambridge Sustainable Food (CSF).
- Supporting free exercise referrals by GPs for low income residents in Cambridge. One client who received an exercise referral before the pandemic started was able to complete their exercise programme at local sports facilities, but no new clients were referred by GPs during the Covid-19 pandemic due to the closure of gyms and sports facilities.