

## Health and Wellbeing Board Paper

### 1. Reference Information

Paper tracking information	
<b>Title:</b>	Addressing wider determinants of health inequalities in Surrey: Poverty
<b>Related Health and Wellbeing Priority:</b>	Priority 3: Supporting people in Surrey to fulfil their potential
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<b>Paper date:</b>	2 June 2021
<b>Related papers</b>	Surrey Index – Alpha Version (use of data)

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### 2. Executive summary

The 2030 Community Vision sets out our aspirations for Surrey to be a uniquely special place where everyone has a great start to life, people live healthy and fulfilling lives, are enabled to achieve their full potential and contribute to their community, and no one is left behind. The current Health and Wellbeing Strategy recognises that whilst Surrey is widely perceived as a ‘healthy and wealthy’ county, it is not without its share of challenges, including a significant amount of children and vulnerable people living in poverty, who, along with their families and carers, often experience poor health and wellbeing outcomes. This report provides an update for the Health and Wellbeing Board on:

- the state of poverty in Surrey before the pandemic
- the changing nature of how poverty is experienced in Surrey through the pandemic
- the health inequalities and impacts of relative poverty
- some examples of mitigating actions taken by partners across Surrey to support those in need and tackle some of the arising inequalities
- the need to begin addressing the poverty challenge in Surrey by harnessing the knowledge and best practice of all partners in the refresh of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy

### 3. Recommendations

That the relevant Proper Officer(s) in consultation with the Chairman:

1. Notes the significant demands, issues, and concerns raised about the changing nature of poverty through the pandemic and its impacts on people, and in particular health inequalities.
2. Endorses the inclusion of action against poverty as a delivery programme within the refresh of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

3. Confirms support for the ongoing examination of best practice across Surrey, and the country, with a view to highlighting key initiatives which could positively impact residents and communities experiencing poverty in Surrey.
4. Initiates a delivery programme to target reduction of poverty at system level, as part of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy refresh, drawing together a working group of key partners across Surrey to coordinate best practice initiatives and a jointly-owned action plan to address the causes and experience of poverty in Surrey.
5. Receives a further report, through this working group, outlining different approaches in tackling poverty across other counties in the UK to elaborate on a potential future strategy for Surrey.

## **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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Priority 3 of the Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy is about supporting people in Surrey to fulfil their potential. Living in relative poverty has drastic impacts on physical health and emotional wellbeing, and therefore fundamentally undermines residents' ability and position to achieve their full potential.

There is a clear opportunity in the refresh of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy to build in a new delivery programme to address socio-economic disadvantages - 'reducing health inequalities so no-one is left behind'. A collective effort across the system is needed to understand and counter both the causes and symptoms of relative poverty to ensure that sometimes-overlooked children, young people, families, older people, and carers can access the same life chances as their peers in Surrey.

## **5. Detail**

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### **5.1 Poverty in Surrey**

Despite its perceived affluence, Surrey has always had significant pockets of substantial financial hardship across the county; with children, young people, families, and older people living in conditions of poverty.

In 2019, 10.7% of all households (53,000+) in Surrey were at or below the relative poverty line, with some areas of the county reaching as high as 26% of residents. The largest group within this is older people who live alone, but there were at least 5,000 households with children at or below the poverty line. Furthermore, the outlook for the future of family poverty has been bleak, as the percentage of children living in relative low-income families has been steadily increasing in Surrey over the four years to 2019 in all districts & boroughs.

Recent surveys of available data suggest that the experience of relative poverty in Surrey varies quite radically by geography. The distribution of families in relative poverty has traditionally been more pronounced (more than 10% of families) in Spelthorne, Runnymede, Woking, Reigate & Banstead, and Tandridge. However,

analysing by ward, some of the largest focal points for families in relative poverty are in Waverley, Surrey Heath, and Mole Valley. Excellent outreach work exists at borough and parish level to understand the needs of these residents, and most recently in 2019 the East Surrey Poverty Truth Commission highlighted the stark increases in the need for food banks in Surrey and the complexity of hardship experienced by those people needing assistance.

Several research projects have found that the root causes of poverty in Surrey are varied and often mean that an individual's financial distress is the product of an intricate combination of factors that result in their basic needs not being met. There are frequently cited problems with housing – not just more obvious cases of homelessness but housing instability where families live precariously between different private and social homes. The issue of income stability has also always been complex, with many families struggling with the processes surrounding Universal Credit, and sector changes leading to under-employment (e.g. 'zero-hours contracts') and difficulty in accessing education options to upskill into new jobs. This instability with housing and income often leads to problems managing debts, as high interest loans play an increasing part in solving short-term problems. In addition, there is a high incidence of correlation between relative poverty and social issues such as untreated addictions, undiagnosed mental health problems, domestic violence, and insufficiently supported disabilities in adults and children.

## 5.2 The changing nature of poverty during COVID-19

Over the past year, much collaborative work has been done to analyse the impacts of the pandemic on residents including the Covid-19 Community Impact Assessment, the Local Recovery Index, the Surrey Index, and the work of the refreshed Surrey Office of Data Analytics (SODA).

Pre-pandemic there were many families in Surrey who were only just getting by and were extremely vulnerable to shocks in employment and/or cost of living. These research initiatives have shown that the pandemic and accompanying job-cuts, furlough arrangements, and increases to costs of living during lockdown have worsened the circumstances for these families, with many falling into severe financial distress and being now classed as in relative poverty. This has been characterised by repeated instances of cutting back significantly on food, essential supplies, and the increasing use of debt to make ends meet.

Going into the pandemic, many families were reliant on free school meals (FSMs) to adequately feed their children, and the loss of that provision due to school closures has made that much harder. Nearly 8% of Surrey families were estimated to have faced very low food security at the start of lockdown, where children made do with smaller portions, had to skip meals or went a day without eating between March and September 2020. This is further evidenced by the experience of foodbanks which have grown in number of sites in Surrey in the last year and seen the number of emergency food parcels issued increased by 122% to September 2020 (with similar trends observed into Spring 2021), particularly catering to families with children.

## 5.3 Health inequalities in Surrey

Priority 3 of the Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy is about supporting people in Surrey to fulfil their potential. Living in relative poverty has drastic impacts on healthy lifestyles and emotional wellbeing, and therefore fundamentally undermines residents' ability and position to achieve their full potential.

Crucially, that potential is cut short by relative poverty. While life expectancy from birth has broadly plateaued between 2010 and 2017 in Surrey - compared to previous decades - the inequality in life expectancy has actually increased in different parts of the county for both men and women ([Life expectancy – Surrey-i](#)).

National research suggests poverty can affect the health of people at all ages, beyond just life expectancy. For instance, nearly all long-term conditions are more common in adults from lower socio-economic groups, including the working poor, such as diabetes, obesity, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, arthritis and hypertension – usually around twice the rate of incidence for people on lower incomes in the age group 45-64. There is also a vicious cycle observed where underemployment and unemployment contribute to poor mental and physical health, which in turn makes it even more difficult to find work. This negative cycle can easily transfer across generations, starting from pre-birth, with severe negative impacts upon parenting, educational attainment, and future employment prospects.

The impact of relative poverty is most pronounced in research on the life chances of children, with the effects of socio-economic disadvantage being wide reaching and long lasting. In infancy, it is associated with a low birth weight, shorter life expectancy, a higher risk of death in the first year of life, and a higher likelihood to suffer from chronic diseases and diet-related problems. Poverty is also strongly associated with cognitive development, and those children living in poverty are over three times more likely to suffer from mental health problems. However, most strikingly when considering the future of health care, longitudinal studies have shown that children growing up in poverty tend to suffer more complications of illness and have a higher risk of death as adults across almost all health conditions.

## 5.4 An illustration of initiatives in Surrey to mitigate poverty

Both before and during the pandemic, Surrey has had many examples of helpful initiatives designed to improve and remedy the experience of those in poverty in the county. The following are some examples of projects working, directly or indirectly, to support those in relative poverty.

Surrey Homeless Multi Agency Group	A Multi Agency Group (MAG) was formed and funded across Surrey County Council, District & Borough Councils, Surrey Police and other partner agencies to review and address issues relating to homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic
Citizens Advice	District & Borough Councils work with and funding projects directly with Citizens Advice to understand

	and support the needs of residents in financial distress.
Community Foundation for Surrey	Bringing together local donors and those acting to provide positive solutions in our communities for local people and disadvantaged individuals.
“Everyone in” initiative	At the beginning of the pandemic, the Government supported local authorities in getting ‘everyone in’; helping those sleeping rough to move into self-contained accommodation.
Covid Winter Grant Scheme	Funding targeted at benefit related FSM (circa 17,000), children with Funded Early Education Provision (FEEP) & EY Pupil Premium (circa 1700), care leavers up to the age of 25, and vulnerable adults (e.g. homeless, domestic abuse survivors).
Surrey Crisis Fund	Discretionary fund run by Surrey County Council since 2013 (formerly the Local Assistance Scheme) providing financial help to Surrey residents who have urgent needs in an emergency.
Surrey food banks	There are more than 30 grassroots, community organisations aimed at supporting people who cannot afford the essentials in life, often themselves supported through the Trussell Trust.
Surrey's Local Resilience Forum (LRF)	A multi-agency partnership made up of representatives from local public services, which runs a welfare cell that coordinated food deliveries to vulnerable residents through the pandemic.
Covid-19 mutual aid groups	Community-organised groups providing direct support to those who were more at risk from Covid-19 or under hardship during the lockdown, helping with buying food and/or cooking.
the Kickstart Scheme	Fund to create quality jobs for young people through new 6-month job placements for young people who are currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment.
Mental Health Partnership Improvement Board	Independently-chaired review board for Surrey’s system of mental health services, focusing on driving improvements particularly for those with existing health inequalities.

## 5.5 A HWB Strategy delivery programme for poverty

As long as relative poverty continues to increase in Surrey, the accompanying health inequalities across the population will continue to worsen and jeopardise the potential and life chances of children, young people, families, older people, and their carers in Surrey. In order to build on the progress of these initiatives from 2020, the system in Surrey will need better coordination, practice sharing, and creative problem solving for gaps in provision to understand the experience and drivers of poverty and its impact on health.

As part of the HWB Strategy refresh, the important next step to take is the initiation of a delivery programme for poverty at system level, drawing together all key partners across Surrey. This programme, sponsored and led under Priority 3 of the HWB Strategy, should examine the impacts of collaborative work to mitigate poverty during the pandemic, share best practice initiatives, and coordinate a jointly-owned action plan to address the causes and experience of poverty for our residents.

Resident surveys and service reviews from community partners have suggested a number of areas for further analysis which could be included as part of a future delivery programme, including:

- how to make access points and sign-posting for support services concerning financial distress more open and easy to find
- how to replace government short-term funding for food banks experiencing unprecedented demand
- examining the demands for housing and the potential gaps in provision given new demand pressures from those falling behind on rent/mortgage payments
- tailoring lifelong learning opportunities toward upskilling for those adults in families dropping into relative poverty due to economic shocks
- ensuring plans for sector economic recovery – particularly through the One Surrey Growth Board – properly entail consideration of the families recently falling into relative poverty
- how current provision of childcare support matches the changing needs of families balancing new employment circumstances (or seeking employment)

## 6. How is this being communicated?

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Key local partners

- Districts and Boroughs
- Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector organisations (including food banks, Citizen's Advice centres, etc)

Key national sources for best practice and insight

- Child Poverty Action Group
- Resolution Foundation
- Shelter

## 7. Next steps

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- Drawing together key stakeholders to identify key poverty issues arising and best practice in tackling those issues across Surrey
  - Initiating a delivery programme for poverty, and convening a working group to consider the best means of drawing together analysis and best practice to create a poverty action plan for Surrey
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