

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****DATE: 30 NOVEMBER 2021****REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: CLARE CURRAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES****LEAD OFFICER: RACHAEL WARDELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING****SUBJECT: A STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO CHILD POVERTY****ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY: GROWING A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY SO EVERYONE CAN BENEFIT/ TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITY/ENABLING A GREENER FUTURE/ EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES****Purpose of the Report:**

During the pandemic, SCC conducted a Community Impact Assessment, which highlighted a number of realities faced by residents, particularly with regard to recent financial hardship caused by COVID-19. As 55% of residents who were just about managing before the pandemic found themselves falling into significant financial hardship, eligibility for free school meals rising by 26%, and most food banks experiencing over 100% increases in demand, there was a clear case to act to ensure that Surrey families are supported out of relative poverty brought on by the pandemic.

Cabinet has developed the scope for further work on a Surrey poverty strategic approach and framework, initially focused on bringing down the rate of child poverty, to ensure that 'no one is left behind', with coordinated poverty-specific activity and initiatives across each of the four Organisational Strategy Priority Objectives. The core of this approach is to not just fine tune the support services that already exist, but also conduct a review of community need to better target the root causes of poverty. This strategic response to child poverty will form part of the report on the state of poverty in Surrey going to Council in December.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Endorse the strategic response to child poverty
2. Acknowledge a new poverty working group of officers across all services responsible for consolidating this strategic framework, and scoping the costs and benefits of undertaking new interventions within this framework for consideration by Cabinet
3. Continue its leadership of putting a response to poverty at the heart of the refresh of the Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Reason for Recommendations:

A strategic response to child poverty will ensure that SCC stays true to its principle of 'no one left behind' and deliver a number of benefits to Surrey residents. A more aligned strategy around support services will ensure cross-cutting understanding of personal circumstances; more tailored advice and support, more effective signposting between

services and community offerings, effective targeting of hardship funds for families, and new projects to mitigate and impact the root causes of poverty in the county.

Executive Summary:

Background

1. During the pandemic, SCC conducted a Community Impact Assessment, which highlighted a number of realities faced by residents, particularly with regard to recent financial hardship caused by COVID-19. As 55% of residents who were just about managing before the pandemic found themselves falling into significant financial hardship, eligibility for free school meals rising by 26%, and most food banks experiencing over 100% increases in demand, there was a clear case to act to ensure that Surrey families are supported out of relative poverty brought on by the pandemic.
2. The Council has always taken the issue of poverty seriously and there are already mitigations in place to help support families in financial need. These initiatives include examples such as support through Family Centres, Funded Early Education, Binti period poverty campaign, and direct funding for community-based poverty projects and needs through the Surrey Crisis Fund, Covid Local Grant Scheme, Household Support Fund, Changing Futures Fund, and the Contain Outbreak Management Fund.
3. Cabinet has developed the scope for further work on a Surrey poverty strategic approach and framework, initially focused on bringing down the rate of child poverty, to ensure that 'no one is left behind', with coordinated poverty-specific activity and initiatives across each of the four Organisational Strategy Priority Objectives. The core of this approach is to not just fine tune the support services that already exist, but also conduct a review of community need to better target the root causes of poverty.
4. This strategic response to child poverty will form part of the report on the state of poverty in Surrey going to Council in December. The report will set out the data on the changing nature of poverty in the county, the current activity SCC is undertaking to support residents (especially families) experiencing financial hardship, and the strategy across the four Priority Objectives to go beyond mitigations and toward tackling the root causes of poverty in Surrey in the years ahead. An officer working group on poverty has been set up to scope, analyse, and cost potential new initiatives and best practice to form part of this strategy under each of the four objectives, as well as engage the community on how best to co-design and communicate support services to best meet resident needs.

Strategic Approach

5. The strategic response to child poverty will seek to:
 - Emphasise an ethos of thriving communities at the core of SCC's review on poverty support services in the county; taking a new and iterative approach toward engaging with all parts of the community to ensure that conclusions are consensus views, changes are co-designed, and duties to make improvements are co-owned.
 - Take a systemic approach to the issue of financial hardship at Health & Wellbeing Board level to truly gain partner buy-in into tackling this complex

expanding issue where others may have more insight into what makes the greatest impact on residents' lives.

- Shift more short-term mitigations of emergency funds toward projects which can evidence impacts on preventing poverty and getting families out of financial distress for the long-term. One key example of this is recent allocations from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), which have been through a new process to identify how to allocate toward the projects which will make the most difference to getting families out of poverty for the long-term.
- Review how the Council can be more of an exemplar and influencer, looking at the ethical considerations around poverty which concern SCC as an employer, provider of services, systems leader and procurer of services.
- Look at better partnering with business, schools, public sector partners including the NHS to share data and evidence on the experience of poverty that all encounter to better coordinate intelligence-based, joined-up interventions in future.
- Using the data sources available (and already developing further) to inform how to better target interventions in a more 'hyper-local' way to where the need is greatest.
- Addressing structural disadvantage beyond just health inequalities, putting indicators of multiple deprivation at the heart of more of our service delivery.

Strategic Framework under the four Organisational Strategy Priority Objectives

6. Empowering Communities

- Interventions on childcare support and early years education to narrow the attainment gap and support working parents into new and better work
- Improving advice on benefits / income support / budgeting / family cost saving to help residents understand and make the best use of the national and local support that is available to them
- Partnering with project leaders in the VCFS community to identify and replicate best practice to guarantee the whole county is served by a network of strong and thriving community support initiatives
- Harnessing the frontline knowledge of resident needs within the VCFS community to inform future funding of support and future shaping of SCC services designed for families experiencing financial hardship
- Improving relations with schools regarding how information is shared about family circumstances, and how support services are shaped and communicated to suit different family needs

7. Growing a Sustainable Economy

- Increasing and changing the focus of linking support toward employment pathways, appreciating the necessary steps of confidence-building and personalised assistance to secure opportunities after a period of under- or unemployment
- Expanding into different aspects of employability support, addressing gaps in county provision from community partners to ensure that residents have access to tailored advice on skills acquisition, job seeking, and balancing responsibilities

- Advocating the use of an ethical living wage and opportunities for job creation as an employer, procurer of services from local/national suppliers, and partner to local business
 - Working with the further education sector to better target skills training and re-training toward specific local needs, making use of the new Surrey Skills Leadership Forum co-Chaired by representatives from the business and provider communities
 - Improving procurement and business ties for better intelligence on impacts of initiatives supporting better living standards and getting into new/better jobs
8. Tackling Health Inequality
- Improving the collaborative relationship with the NHS to better share information on how the system identifies and supports those in financial hardship as a wider determinant to health inequalities and adverse health outcomes
 - Exploring changing the communication around and accessibility of mental and physical health support focusing upon prevention and early intervention
 - Better tailoring of disability support to more explicitly link and address the unique needs around financial hardship
 - Working alongside districts and boroughs to make the most of our collective resources, knowledge, and networks to support homeless residents and people sleeping rough
9. Enabling a Greener Future
- Fine tuning our active travel plans and public transportation planning to ensure that personal cost impacts are better reflected
 - Ensuring infrastructure, from transport to public community assets / green space, is more accessible and open to the most vulnerable residents
 - Targeting fuel poverty with new pilot programmes to help families manage their energy bills during the winter months and break the cycle of families in financial hardship being put onto the priciest energy plans for heating their homes
 - Making better use of partnerships to improve campaigns on costly waste and how to avoid waste

Consultation:

10. The strategic approach and framework scope are products of a Cabinet working group with input included from the Cabinet Members for: Children & Families, Communities, Health, and Economy.
11. All district and borough councils have fed into the framework development process, and data / insight on poverty in Surrey has been shared with officers in all authorities to aid their work.
12. The rationale and approach of the poverty framework is a product of multiple rounds of engagement with Voluntary, Community, Faith Sector (VCFS) partner organisations across the county. SCC has taken part in the East Surrey Poverty Truth Commission, and invested in significant ethnographic research and other qualitative methods to effectively integrate more of the lived experience of financial hardship in Surrey and its residents' voices.
13. The Children's Select Committee has been informed and will review the framework and action plan when it is completed.

Risk Management and Implications:

14. N/A – the strategic response to child poverty does not yet have financial or practical risk implications for service delivery

Financial and Value for Money Implications:

15. Positively, the change in approach toward more prevention over mitigation on poverty has led to new ways of working. For instance, a renewed approach has been adopted for assessing funding toward prevention of poverty and long-term support for families in financial distress, such as the successful bids/allocations from the Local Grant Scheme, Contain Outbreak Management Fund, and Changing Futures Fund.
16. At present, the strategic response to child poverty does not have financial implications. However, businesses cases will follow to Cabinet on future new projects to aid residents, and there is the ambition to decrease demand on Council services in the longer term as the severity and extent of poverty impacts are relieved.

Section 151 Officer Commentary:

17. Although significant progress has been made over the last twelve months to improve the Council's financial position, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2021/22 remains uncertain. The public health crisis has resulted in increased costs which may not be fully funded. With uncertainty about the ongoing impact of this and no clarity on the extent to which both central and local funding sources might be affected in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term. As such, the Section 151 Officer supports the development of the proposed strategic response to child poverty. At present the expectation is that the strategy will be delivered within the available financial envelope.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:

18. The Children Act 1989 and Section 11 Children Act 2004 is the primary legislation which sets out the Councils' duties to support the welfare of children. In addition to setting out a statutory framework for meeting assessed needs, it outlines the responsibility for promoting wellbeing, focussing on prevention and the provision of information, advice and services.
19. The strategic response to child poverty that Cabinet is being asked to consider does not in any way change the Council's existing statutory duties but sets out plans that will enable the Council to meet existing obligations.
20. There are no additional legal implications that the Cabinet needs to be aware of at this time.

Equalities and Diversity:

21. The intent of the strategic response to child poverty is to scope new areas to positively impact EDI, given various minority communities experience financial hardship more significantly and/or differently to others.

Other Implications:

22. The potential implications for the following council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant a summary of the issues is set out in detail below.

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	N/A
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	The expectation is that any impacts on safeguarding responsibilities would be positive, with potential reduction in the need for safeguarding activity as family circumstances improve. This will be a key indicator for the long-term success of the strategic response to child poverty.
Environmental sustainability	N/A
Compliance against net-zero emissions and climate compatibility	N/A
Public Health	N/A – aligned for future impacts

What Happens Next:

23. Next related milestones:
- a. SCC Poverty Officer Working Group to convene in November 2021
 - b. Poverty Report to Council due in December 2021
 - c. Poverty update due to Health & Wellbeing Board (HWB) in December 2021
 - d. HWB Poverty Strategic Implementation plan due by March 2022
 - e. SCC business cases for new activity due in Spring 2022

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Consulted and/or Engaged in Partnership:

- Cabinet Members for: Children & Families, Communities, Health, and Economy
- Cabinet Informal
- Executive Director CFLL, Executive Director PPG, Executive Director C&C
- District & Borough Councils
- Partner organisations in VCFS
- National charities
- Regional and National County Council Authorities

Annexes:

- (Annex I) SCC response to child poverty: approach
- (Annex II) SCC response to child poverty: framework

SCC response to child poverty: approach

Short-term mitigations, Long-term preventative action

- Surrey Crisis Fund & Local Grant Scheme (£250k to food banks in 2021)
- Contain Outbreak Management Fund (£1m for poverty projects)
- Changing Futures Fund (housing) & Fuel poverty Ds&Bs group
- Health & Wellbeing Board ('addressing wider determinants of health')
- One Surrey Growth Board ('opportunities within a balanced economy')

SCC will be an exemplar (direct influence)

- As provider of care services to adults, children, & families; as well as an employer, procurer, and in delivery of joined up interventions

SCC will be a positive pressure (indirect influence)

- As a community convenor, partner to schools/businesses/NHS, and public advocate toward government

Using geographic targeting & localities focus

- Harnessing the data we have from SODA and services (e.g. sectoral shocks, DV and safeguarding, MH referrals, FSM eligibility by area, etc)
- "Priority places" community work – see paper to HWBB

Addressing structural disadvantage

- Intersectionality of multiple deprivation for subsets of the community; and the changing distribution of children & families

SCC response to child poverty: framework



LINKING SUPPORT

Ensuring cross-cutting understanding of personal circumstances, tailored advice and support, effective sign-posting between services and community offerings; making the most of Local Area Coordinators for feedback loops.