

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****DATE: 25 JANUARY 2022****REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: CLARE CURRAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES****LEAD OFFICER: RACHAEL WARDELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING****SUBJECT: NO ONE LEFT BEHIND: CHILD POVERTY IN SURREY****ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY AREA: TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITY/ EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES****Purpose of the Report:**

The Cabinet is asked to review this report on the state of poverty in Surrey following a request for data at council in December 2020. Cabinet is asked to propose to Council that the following Surrey County Council (SCC) strategic response to child poverty be adopted and continue to be developed across all service areas through 2022 and beyond.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Cabinet make the following recommendations to the County Council:

1. To note the data research review on poverty, with emphasis on children, in Surrey as requested in a previous Council motion.
2. To endorse and adopt the proposed framework, approach and themes as the basis for the Council's strategic response to child poverty in the county.

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:

1. In December 2020, council agreed to commission a report on poverty in Surrey, so that council could 'fully understand the complexity, scale and impact on children'. Recognising that family poverty is a complex issue which requires joined-up systemic action over the longer-term, council also commissioned a strategic response seeking to influence the root causes of financial hardship impacting children.
2. Working with the Surrey Office of Data Analytics (SODA), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Citizens Advice, and local community partners, the Surrey County Council (SCC) research team reviewed and triangulated various available data sets

to add insight into the prevalence of poverty in Surrey up to 2020. To add to this picture, various other Surrey-based quantitative and qualitative methods, including the Community Impact Assessment, were used to draw conclusions about the changing nature of financial hardship – particularly as it affects families – following the beginning of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

3. While there are numerous insights about how poverty has developed differently across the county, there are a number of consistent trends and generalisations which can be observed for the whole county. In particular, while Surrey is often seen as 'affluent', the relative high standard of living acts both to increase the cost of living for struggling families and to obscure the pockets of hardship where they do exist. It is also clear that poverty generally – and child poverty in particular – has been rising in every district and borough in the county for the past five years. Moreover, the rate of increase in families falling into relative poverty has been substantially higher since the start of the pandemic, with many families needing to access support services for the first time. But positively, the research also demonstrates that Surrey has an extensive network of council and community initiatives to support families in need. While these services could be better coordinated and targeted in places, and certain gaps must be filled, the network of local authorities, public agencies, voluntary/community/faith sector (VCFS) organisations delivers some understanding of residents' needs and how best to support families experiencing financial hardship.
4. Drawing on the tenets of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 and the work of the Social Mobility Commission (SMC), councils across the UK have trialled various iterative poverty reduction strategies to varying effect. In assessing the available data on the experience of poverty in Surrey, the council consulted with other county councils and unitary authorities to understand comparative practice in reducing family poverty. This intelligence gathering has been particularly focused on evidence-based interventions, and how best to align existing services with potential new activity that targets the root causes of poverty.
5. Using the data research from across the county and the evidence of successful practice elsewhere in the country, cabinet has developed the scope for an approach and framework which make up SCC's strategic response to child poverty. The themes of this response will bring together new and existing activity to influence child poverty under each of the Organisational Strategy Priority Objectives. As the council continues to build on its work to mitigate the impacts of poverty and start to address the root causes of family financial hardship, this response will also sit as part of a broader whole system response to poverty (as a wider determinant of health) through the Surrey Health & Wellbeing Board.

Consultation:

6. 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.
7. 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.

8. 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.
9. The Children's Select Committee has been informed and will review the substance within the strategic response framework as it evolves.

Risk Management and Implications:

10. The strategic response to child poverty does not yet have an immediate financial or practical risk implications for service delivery.

Financial and Value for Money Implications:

11. 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.
12. 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:

13. 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:

14. In addition to the specific provisions within the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, the Children Act 1989 and Section 11 Children Act 2004 are 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.

15. 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.
16. There are no additional legal implications that the Cabinet needs to be aware of at this time.

Equalities and Diversity:

17. Devising a strategic response to child poverty will enable SCC to scope additional means of positively impacting EDI, given communities experience financial hardship more significantly and/or differently to others.

Other Implications:

18. 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:
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.
Public Health	Aligned for future work at system level with HWBB

What Happens Next:

19. The poverty report will be commended to the next formal meeting of Council.
20. The poverty report will be shared with the Health & Wellbeing Board to be considered as it continues to put poverty at the heart of a systemic response to the wider determinants of health inequalities.
21. An officer working group will continue an audit of activities the Council is already undertaking or could undertake to strengthen the strategic response, bringing forward business cases for new projects and programmes of work.
22. A cross-party monitoring group will be assembled to track progress of the response, either as an SCC grouping or a task force reporting the Health & Wellbeing Board

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Annexes:

Annex 1: No One Left Behind: Child Poverty in Surrey

Sources/background papers:

Cabinet Paper – 30 November 2021 – [Item 10](#)

Council Motion – 08 December 2020 – [Item 8 \(i\)](#)

ANNEX 1

NO ONE LEFT BEHIND: CHILD POVERTY IN SURREY

SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION

Background

Surrey is characterised as a pleasant green county, with high levels of education, emergent and innovative enterprise, higher productivity and ‘value add’ compared with strong neighbours in the south east, and general affluence relative to the rest of England. However, while the fundamentals of the economic picture for Surrey are very bright, this history of success and proximity to London also mean high costs of living and obscured experiences of isolation from this ‘relative affluence’. For some residents, especially families with children, both before and after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, life in Surrey is one of financial struggle and failing to make ends meet at the end of a working week.

Defining poverty

Defining financial struggle academically is not without controversy, not least in a county like Surrey where the basic means needed to get by are higher than elsewhere in the country. For the purposes of reviewing the state of poverty, the council has sought to apply the conventional definition of ‘relative poverty’ as households who are on an income of less than 60% of the median national income, measured by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) through Households Below Average Income (HBAI) National Statistics published annually.



While ‘relative poverty’ is useful for classification purposes, this does not shed any light on the unique nature of family circumstances. Nationally, households who may be classified in this way will vary radically. It includes those experiencing recent financial crisis to those in intergenerational hardship, those in work or surviving on some combination of work and benefits, single person households to large families with many children, and those living within wealthy urban centres compared to those in more isolated rural communities. The experience of poverty is also not firmly limited to strict conceptions of income poverty alone, with many family crises presenting in the form of insufficiency or instability of (some combination of) food, fuel, housing, transport, digital access, and general social mobility. Because the causes of these family insufficiencies differ drastically – from unexpected shocks to deeply rooted social issues – identifying needs in the community and associated mitigations is only part of the answer. The more complex task of addressing the causes is vital for a longer-term change in circumstances.

In addition, though the terminology of ‘poverty’ is also useful for consistent typology, it is problematic for a local authority seeking to provide support services. Labels of ‘poverty’ or ‘deprivation’ are often associated with unhelpful preconceived notions of paternalism which have the potential to alienate residents if they do not or cannot associate themselves with these words. One particular point of investigation within Surrey is the degree to which the use of support services has an associated stigma for residents, and potential for residents to turn away from assistance because of this stigma or communications that alienate them. Any interventions in the Surrey system, as mitigations to poverty or moving into targeting the causes, will need to be mindful of the use of empathetic language to connect with affected residents.



In examining poverty in Surrey, therefore, the council is conscious that raw data and statistics will only provide part of the picture on positive intervention. To be successful, the council will need more specific local information and deeper community insights to identify and appreciate the circumstances of the residents experiencing financial hardship.

Impacts of poverty

Despite these complications, the issue of poverty in the county remains a concern shared across the council. It is well documented that living in financial hardship, most acutely in the case of children, has drastic negative impacts on life expectancy, health, and wellbeing – fundamentally undermining residents’ capacity and capability to achieve their full potential.

National research suggests poverty can affect people at all ages. For instance, nearly all long-term health 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 with pre-birth, with impacts in the first 1,000 days of life influencing child health outcomes, educational attainment and future employment prospects in turn.

The effect of relative poverty is most pronounced in research on the life chances of children, with the impressions 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.

The county council is also particularly concerned with the issue of poverty due to its negative impacts on family breakdown and ever rising need for local authority intervention (as well as that from the wider system including the NHS, Surrey Police, Surrey Fire & Rescue). Poverty puts severe pressure on families, and often leads to rising incidence of physical and mental health crises, addictions, neglect, and domestic violence. Because of this additional pressure on parents, the children in families experiencing financial hardship are more likely to require safeguarding measures and far less likely to be focused and supported at school (with over 1 in 3 children on free school meals leaving primary school with substandard achievement in maths and English). Children in these families are much more prone to health inequalities and need for health and care intervention, increasingly driving up demand on already stretched emergency, medical, and social services.

Council motion on child poverty

Following an extensive debate on how best to impact on the life chances of children growing up in families experiencing relative poverty, council agreed in December 2020 to a number of actions to better understand and then respond to the issue:

1. Ask officers to assess data from the Community Impact Assessment and on-going work with the DWP, Citizens' Advice Bureau, Surrey Welfare Rights Unit and the Community Foundation for Surrey to produce a report on poverty in Surrey, so Council can fully understand the complexity, scale and impact on children of poverty in Surrey, including the wider cohort of families now experiencing poverty.
2. Lobby government to continue to fund local government appropriately to mitigate the social effects of Covid-19, especially those affecting children and families.
3. Support the work of the One Surrey Growth Board in seeking to support post-Covid economic recovery and to provide the quality jobs and training that can offer a long-term solution to the issue.
4. Support the new Executive Director of Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture to lead a Council wide response to the report on child poverty in Surrey and to address the issue of poor outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including working with schools to provide an Inclusive curriculum that supports the most disadvantaged and developing the Helping Families Early initiative with partners, built on the principle that 'everyone can do something'.
5. Support the Leader as Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board to continue its work in addressing and prioritising this issue.
6. Support the First 1000 Days initiative with Health/County Council integrated commissioning to improve life chances of babies and young children.
7. Welcome [what was previously] the £2.2 million winter package funding received by Surrey County Council from central government and the work being done with partners to use it to target support to those in most immediate need, alleviating food and fuel poverty.

Council approach

Noting the complexity of the issue, cabinet expressed a preference for the council response to be part of a more coordinated approach taking in the whole Surrey system, and for this response to be grounded in evidence of where to target, how best to impact family outcomes, and increasing the focus on the prevention of poverty rather than simply continuing mitigations.

Working with the Surrey Office of Data Analytics (SODA), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Citizens Advice, and local community partners, the Surrey County Council (SCC) research team reviewed and triangulated various available data sets to add insight into the prevalence of poverty in Surrey up to 2020. To add to this picture, various other Surrey-based quantitative and qualitative methods, including the Community Impact Assessment, were used to draw conclusions about the changing nature of financial hardship – particularly as it affects families – following the beginning of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

SECTION 2 – POVERTY IN SURREY BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

General overview

Because most national data sources only published up to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 analysis on ‘relative poverty’ data sets, like those published through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS), is confined to conclusions running up to 2019/2020. However, there are a number of clear patterns and observations which provide a backdrop for poverty in Surrey in recent years.

In 2019, approximately 53,179 households, just over 10.7% of all households in Surrey, were experiencing relative poverty. This was slightly lower than the south east regional average in England. While there was some variation across the county, there was a substantial incidence in every district and borough [Figure 1].

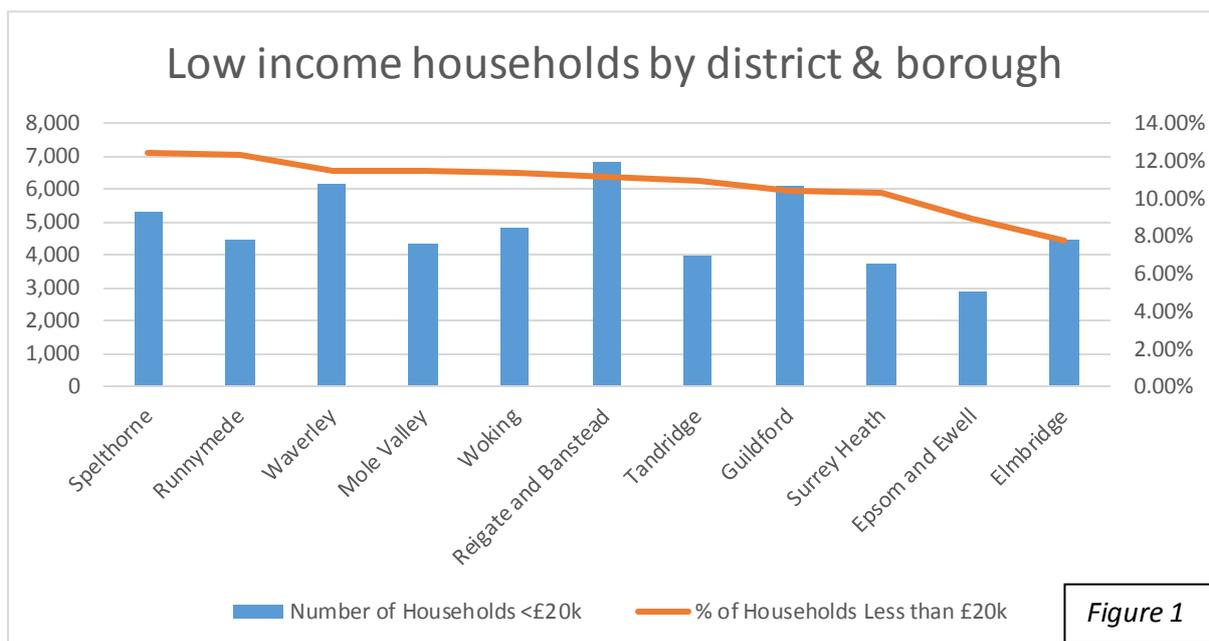


Figure 1

In general, these households tended to be mainly in larger towns and more urban areas. Areas which had particularly high prevalence of income deprivation were:

Stanwell North & Moor	Spelthorne	26.9% households
Holmwood	Mole Valley	25.4% households
Park Barn & University	Guildford	25.0% households
Goldsworth Park	Woking	23.4% households
Ash Wharf	Guildford	21.8% households

Figure 2

Child poverty

In 2019/20, there were nearly 20,000 children living in relative poverty (5,130 households with an estimated annual income of less than £20,000). This was 3.4% of all households with children in Surrey. Crucially, the percentage of children living in relative low-income families was steadily increasing over the previous four years in every district and borough [Figure 3]. This was also reflected in eligibility for free school meals (FSMs), rising to 9.5% in 2019-20 (up from 7.2% in 2017-18).

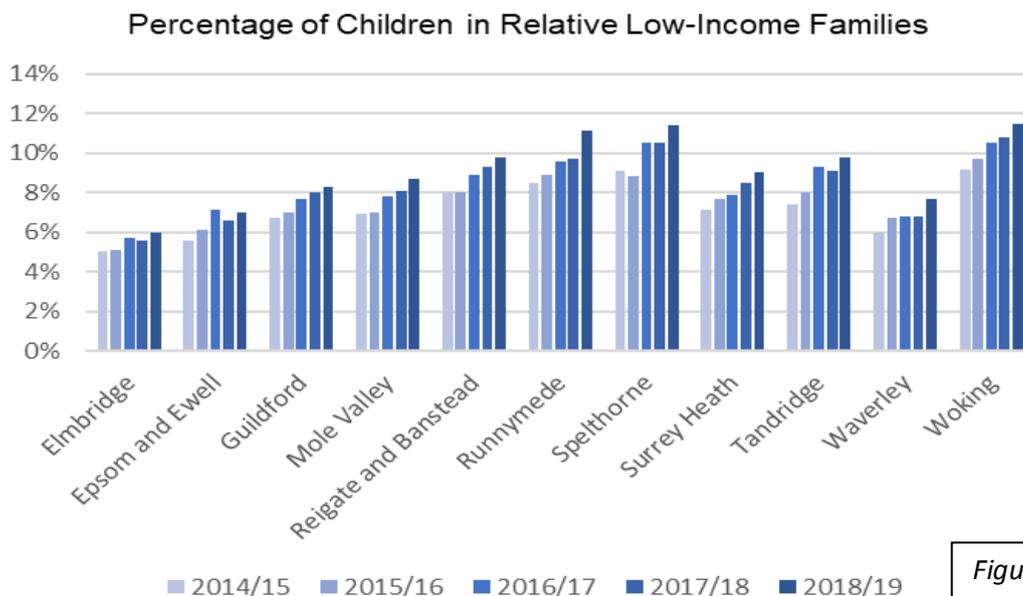
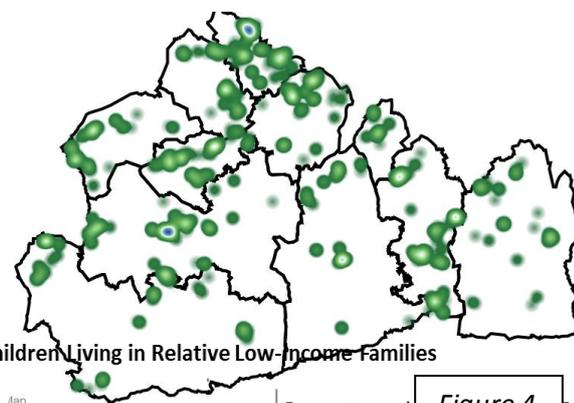


Figure 3

Despite three areas within Surrey being in the bottom quintile of most deprived areas nationally, children in poor households were not necessarily concentrated in these areas. In fact, over 40% of children in relative poverty in Surrey were not even in areas statistically considered 'deprived' at all. Instead, there are various urban and remote areas in each district and borough where these families were more likely to be located [Figure 4].



Top 10 Wards for Children Living in Relative Low-Income Families

The concentration of children in low-income families is skewed quite differently across districts and boroughs when compared to the general incidence of relative poverty in the county. For instance, Tandridge has a higher proportion of children and Waverley has a lower proportion of children, but this is inverted when looking at the proportion of overall households in relative

Borough and District	Ward	Percentage of children in relative low-income families
Woking	Canalside	29.45
Waverley	Alfold, Cranleigh Rural and Ellens Green	27.09
Tandridge	Burstow, Horne and Outwood	19.98
Surrey Heath	Old Dean	18.27
Spelthorne	Sunbury Common	17.14
Mole Valley	Leatherhead North	16.06
Guildford	Westborough	15.90
Spelthorne	Stanwell North	15.87
Guildford	Stoke	15.06
Reigate and Banstead	South Park and Woodhatch	14.77

Figure 4

Figure 5

poverty – suggesting that child poverty is uniquely localised.

In particular, these households were identified as being predominantly young (aged less than 25) parents with multiple children, who were renting from social or private landlords, working in less stable/lower wage jobs, struggling with even small increases to bills (such as recent fuel tariff variations), and very specifically localised in each district and borough.

The experience of these parents was one of significant hardship before the pandemic:

“We constantly live under the threat of eviction, life feels like a battle, I just want to work”

“I realised that there were different levels of poverty... circumstances could throw you into poverty...as for the system, we found it took painstaking time whereas if we didn't have the community members' help I'm not really sure what would have happened.”

“I've needed a food bank as well as help from other organisations but I know people [who] have gone through exactly the same issues as me or worse but they don't get the same help. In my opinion they're worse off than I am... there's an inconsistency in all of this... [the system] doesn't work, it's not working.”

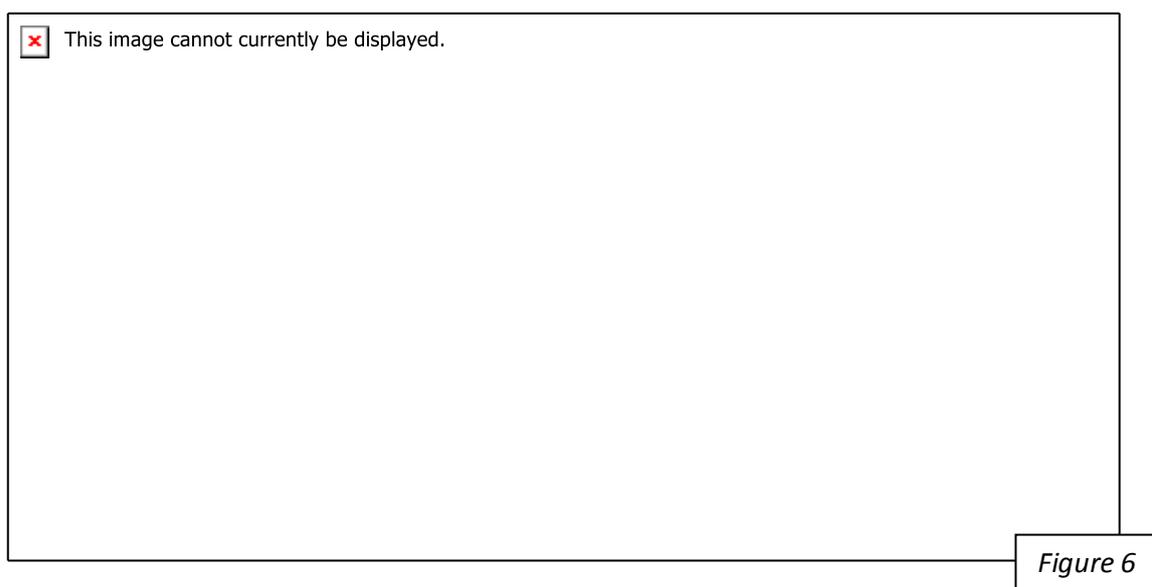
- East Surrey Poverty Truth Commission

SECTION 3 – POVERTY IN SURREY AFTER THE PANDEMIC STARTED

Economic shock

Like most areas of the UK, Surrey experienced lopsided financial impacts as the country entered a series of lockdowns following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. While some corners of the community adapted quickly and easily to working and studying from home, other residents faced a much more perilous year of being furloughed on 80% of already relatively low pay in sectors where working from home was not possible (like non-essential logistics), or unemployment from sectors particularly vulnerable to lockdown shutdowns (like hospitality). The reality of this situation was many more households, who were previously able to carefully manage their finances to keep themselves above the poverty line, were falling below that line for the first time.

The number of Universal Credit (UC) claimants has increased significantly across Surrey since the pandemic began – and since the last official estimates of children in low income were made. Total claims more than doubled from March 2020 to August 2021, increasing from 21,148 to 49,679, a staggering increase of 235% on immediate pre-pandemic levels [Figure 6]. Claims that had dependent children also increased significantly: virtually doubling from 10,978 to 21,739 by August 2021 (up 198%). While UC claims are not the only determinant of child relative poverty levels, they do play a major part, so it is estimated that current child and adult poverty levels will be running at increased rates relative to the last known official position.



While the impacts across Surrey were clearly significant, they were also particularly localised in certain areas:

- Instead of three, there are now four areas that fall into the bottom quintile in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (approximately 30,000 people).
- While life expectancy from birth broadly plateaued until 2017 in Surrey, the inequality in life expectancy has actually increased since. By 2021, this gap in some adjacent wards means a differential in life expectancy of up to 10 years for residents living only a few streets apart.

The Community Impact Assessment (CIA) sought to gain a better understanding of how residents were coping during the initial worst period of the pandemic. Most results of the research confirmed assumptions that economic conditions had worsened for many, particularly as **55%** of residents ‘just getting by’ before the pandemic considered themselves to have been negatively impacted [Figure 7]. One resident went as far as to say “*we fell off a cliff really*” when asked about their ability to manage their household finances and bills as the pandemic struck.

What impact has the coronavirus crisis had on the income of your household, if any?

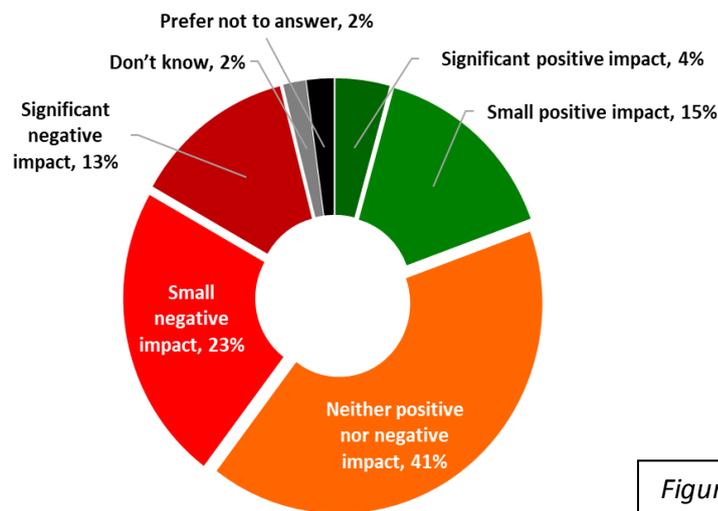


Figure 7

However, some findings were more unexpected. Over **75%** of residents felt financial assistance was only for the ‘worst off’ and cited this as a reason which put them off seeking help even when facing financial hardship for the first time. As a result, **30%** of residents felt they did not receive enough information about support services from the council, and many minority communities did not feel they should (or how to) go about engaging the council for help when they needed it.

Further inquiry with residents found that there was substantial uncertainty around obtaining financial support or a lack of awareness as to what residents may be eligible for, both in terms of benefits and support services. This uncertainty was exacerbated because many of the residents concerned found themselves suddenly requiring support for the first time, having never previously needed benefits or engaged with support services before. To make matters worse, the problems of accessing support were hampered by rolling lockdowns which inhibited face-to-face communication, and problems with housing instability and consistent telephone access reduced the ability to keep appointments on track.

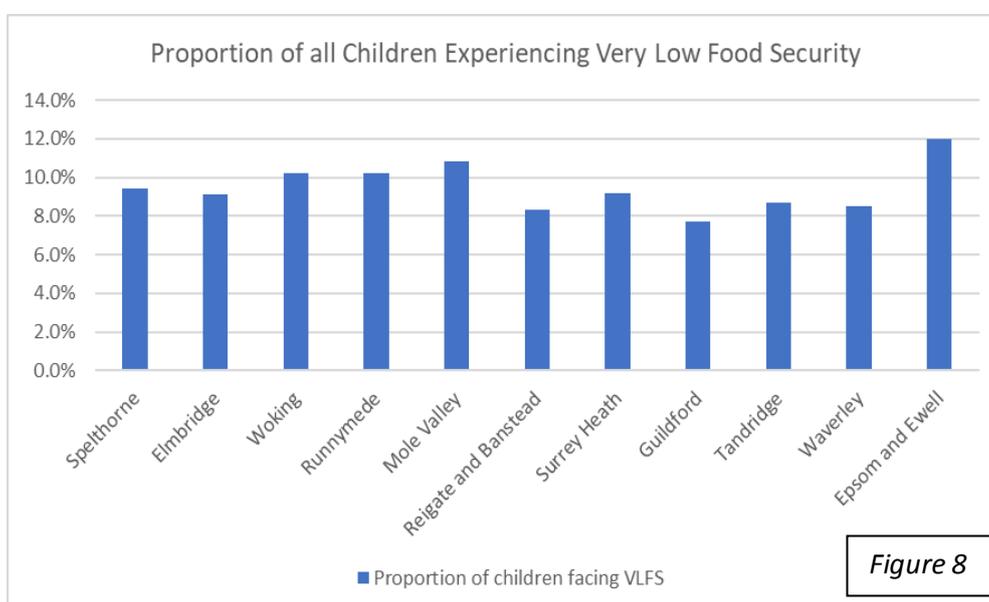
The impact on families

While families on low incomes are traditionally adept at juggling commitments to manage on a limited budget, the pandemic made many of these strategies difficult or impossible to sustain due to lockdowns, furlough, unpredictable hour-reductions (especially in the case of zero hours contracts), and sudden job losses. At the same time, school closures, social

distancing and other COVID-related disruptions have led to significantly increased core costs for many families as learning became more technology-intensive and home-based.

Research into the experience of residents found that various new regrettable strategies emerged: parents cutting back on food (61%), skipping meals (26%), not replacing children's shoes (19%) & winter coats (14%), and using debt to make ends meet (80%). This latter observation around debt was repeated continually through ethnographic research and continued to be raised in 2021 as a primary driver of being unable to break the cycle of new relative poverty as debt-servicing interest payments take precedence over the usual costs like food.

Approximately 7.8% of Surrey families are estimated to have faced very poor food security during the start of the pandemic [Figure 8], where children made do with smaller portions, skipped meals or went a day without eating.



Food security became a very important area of research as the Trussell Trust (which covers 2/3 of foodbanks in Surrey) confirmed that it had to add an additional 6 distribution centres to the existing 25 because of rising demand for help during the pandemic. In many instances, individual foodbanks were reporting demand rising 100-200% from the previous year, especially in areas previously thought of as 'affluent' [Figure 9].

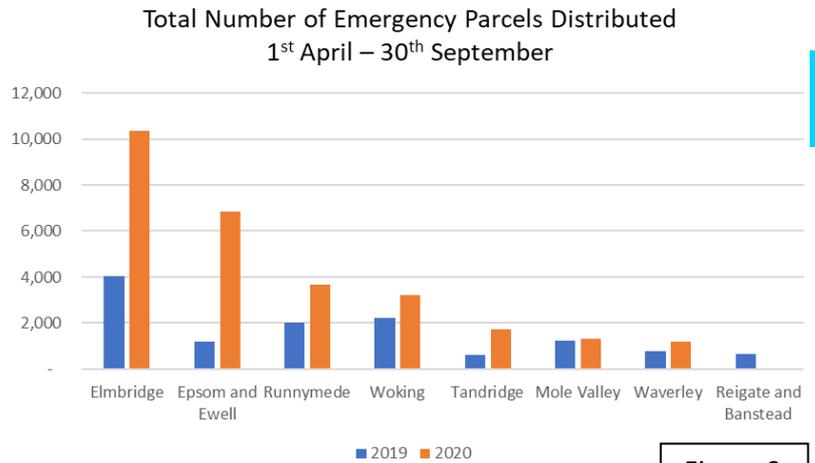


Figure 9

In addition, it is also estimated that the **level of FSM need and eligibility in Surrey has increased by 26%** since Jan 2020, due to the economic conditions caused by the pandemic.

SECTION 4 – WHAT DOES THE SYSTEM DELIVER AROUND POVERTY TO DATE

How the system works together

Positively, the ethnographic research conducted as part of the CIA and through various partners demonstrates that Surrey has an extensive network of two-tier council services, agency provisions, and community initiatives to support families in financial need. This network covers assistance on a range of hardship incidences; covering income, housing, fuel, childcare, debt, addiction, mental health, disability, benefits applications, and job-seeking. The system as whole is, however, difficult to map and understand from any one vantage point, making it tough for residents in need to navigate or fully comprehend the types of support on offer that may be relevant to them.

On the issue of poverty awareness and collaboration, there is a new, shared ambition between partners on the Surrey Health and Wellbeing Board. Together, there is a system plan to do more both to reduce health inequalities prevalent in the system and to address the interwoven causes of poverty (such as addiction, and family breakdown, lack of employment opportunities) by enhancing and amplifying the work that is already ongoing in the community (particularly via VCFS organisations).

The NHS, through the Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care System, for instance, already has multiple workstreams to better capture and share relevant data insights which may relate to poverty indicators, improve processes of referral beyond the medical realm (such as social prescribing), and make the most of its impact as an anchor institution to support people out of poverty (employing residents and procuring services from companies who employ disadvantaged residents).

Similarly, projects and initiatives between the council and various charities (such as Citizens Advice) improve direct support services by increasing the gateways for referral onto additional community services within the system which may not be known to residents. Increasingly, funding is being channelled toward similar projects which support job-seeking as a way out of poverty, enhancing training and advice on locating and securing opportunities.

Residents can also turn to their local district and borough councils who support them with a large variety of support services, particularly when claiming Universal Credit. These include direct support for those facing homelessness or already homeless (prevention and relief duties), housing cost assistance (Discretionary Housing Payments), council tax relief (Section 13A discretionary hardship relief), and guidance on local opportunities for skills training and job-seeking. District and borough councils also provide significant funding and personnel support to local charities and agencies which residents turn to in times of financial hardship.

SCC poverty support services

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the council has significantly enhanced its efforts to support residents facing financial hardship across the county. While many of the universal services offered are designed to support the most vulnerable residents already, the main areas of targeted assistance on poverty have included:

- Surrey Crisis Fund for urgent family needs on food, clothes, utilities, travel
- Covid Local Grant Scheme/Winter Support Grant – more than £5.4m (allocated since Nov 2020) targeting those on free-school meals, homeless, or accessing food banks (18 of which were directly supported)

- Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) – £1.364 million being spent by end 2021/22 on community projects which help address the root causes of poverty (such as through employability training and advice)
- Household Support Fund – £5.3 million allocated within Surrey to be spent on support for food, energy and water bills, with at least 50% focused on families with children
- Binti period poverty campaign to make sanitary products more available across the county in key open community areas
- Surrey Office of Data Analytics (SODA) workstream to develop and assess new methodologies to understand the impacts of particular interventions on residents
- Helping Families Early Strategy – advice and hands-on support through [Surrey's Family Help Hub \(surreysfamilyhelphub.org.uk\)](https://surreysfamilyhelphub.org.uk), Family Centres, Family Support Programme, Children's Single Point of Access, Early Help Hub, and Targeted Youth Support Teams
- Funded Early Education for two-year-olds (FEET) – offering up to 15 hours of funded education and childcare a week for 38 weeks a year to support working parents in or back into work
- Changing Futures programme – Surrey has been awarded £2.8m as one of the fifteen areas to improve systems and services in order to support people to achieve better outcomes where they are experiencing multiple disadvantage (mental health, substance misuse, contact with criminal justice system, domestic abuse, risk of homelessness) alongside their families and support groups
- Alongside the Changing Futures programme, is the homeless multi-agency group which is coordinated by Public Health and links with District & Borough Housing teams and other partners to better support the wider response. It includes a number of workstreams which, for example, aim to build on the success of self-contained cabins introduced during the pandemic and also expand the development of Housing First approach through the use of COMF
- Greener Futures & Public Health fuel poverty system working group to trial initiatives and pilots to help residents manage bills, make homes more fuel efficient and get them off the most expensive tariffs/metered options

Support for residents facing financial hardship is, however, imperfect. These council services, and the services provided by vital partners like district/borough councils, the Surrey Welfare Rights Unit, faith institutions, and foodbanks, could be better joined up, coordinated and targeted in places to ensure that residents do not get lost in a system that is hard to navigate. Across all districts and boroughs, there are also certainly gaps in provision which are not yet filled because some of the system has developed organically and successful projects have not been scaled up (where appropriate) across the whole county yet. However, the research has shown that the system together already has some solid understanding of residents' needs and how best to support families experiencing financial hardship which can be harnessed to achieve more across the county. However, by working with communities to gain deeper insights into their experiences and in co-designing, co-producing and striving for community-led solutions, the system can be more effective moving forward in supporting residents out of poverty for the long-term.

SECTION 5 – SURREY APPROACH FOR STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO CHILD POVERTY

Rationale & framing of poverty

Drawing on the tenets of the Child Poverty Act 2010 and the work of the Social Mobility Commission (SMC), councils across the UK have trialled various iterative poverty reduction strategies to varying effect. In assessing the available data on the experience of poverty in Surrey, the council consulted with other county councils and unitary authorities to understand comparative practice in reducing family poverty. This intelligence gathering has been particularly focused on evidence-based interventions, and how best to align existing services with potential new activity that targets the root causes of poverty, especially those led by communities.

Given the different experiences of poverty that many households will face across the county depending on their unique circumstances, there is a challenge to define a starting point for a new approach to poverty. Learning on lessons learnt in other local authorities and communities, the initial point of focus will be child poverty – specifically targeting the adults in children’s lives who are in financial distress – because the negative impacts on the children are more chronic, more sustained over a lifetime, and because there is more time to influence the factors around their social mobility and health inequalities for the better. This is not to say that initiatives and services will be designed to the exclusion of those residents who do not have children but still face financial need, rather that the primary driver in making choices on prioritisation will be the interests of children.

Raising the profile of poverty

SCC has a clear role to play in driving visible intent and commitment on the issue; explicitly ensuring its various strategies and services are reflective of the poverty priority, including more empathic language/terminology, and properly aligning to deliver a joined-up approach to residents facing financial hardship (‘making every contact count’ in every area). This will necessitate ethical considerations which concern SCC as an employer, provider of services, and procurer of services. Moreover, there is more to do within the council’s work to raise the profile of the issue of poverty in the same way that it acknowledges other disadvantages in these spaces (for example in Equality Impact Assessment) – setting the expectation and narrative for the county in its approach towards poverty. There is also a strong emphasis on the community network approach; meaning a need to work with communities in places they recognise to build trust and relationships, which will enable a deeper understanding of their experiences of poverty and help identify solutions in partnership with them, and fund (where necessary) community-led activities that help them out of poverty for good.

A move to focus on the root causes of poverty

To change the rising trend of poverty in the county, there will need to be a shift from more short-term mitigations of emergency funds toward prevention. This will entail gaining a deeper understanding of need from communities and then developing projects within those communities which are based on evidence of preventative impact and getting families out of financial distress for the long-term. While it will always be important to respond to immediate demands for basic needs (such as through foodbanks) there must also be an expanded repertoire of initiatives that invest for long-term change across issues such as confidence-building, skills training, job-seeking, and support for household cost management.

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. The most immediate need is for better and more available support and guidance on

rights and opportunities, and various community projects are stepping in with new ideas to fill the gap.

SCC working within the system

The county council cannot, however, be the full answer to targeting poverty in Surrey. It is essential that there is a whole system approach to the issue of financial hardship, steered at Health & Wellbeing Board level, to ensure the strongest possible collaboration between all partners in tackling this complex expanding issue. Because communities themselves and other partners may have more insight into what makes the greatest direct impact on residents' lives, it will often be for SCC to acknowledge that expertise and ensure the right networks are coming together to shape new ideas and take control of practical implementation.

As system partners, the council can also look at better collaboration with communities, business, schools, district/borough councils, public agencies, and VCFS to share data and evidence on the experience of poverty that all encounter to better coordinate intelligence-based, joined-up interventions in future. The work ahead will be about building on what the system already has in place, identifying and spreading local and national best practice, replicating appropriate projects proven to make a real difference, and scaling up community-led initiatives. In the future, this will mean SCC adapting its approach to allow communities to own a more localised poverty agenda, which looks across local sectors to understand what has gone wrong, and how best to adapt support to ensure the root causes of poverty are addressed meaningfully.

Community-led change

An ethos of 'Empowered and Thriving Communities' will be 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 co-produced. This effort will need to be wide-ranging – because the causes of poverty are multifaceted, so too will the input required from across all community stakeholders.

A key characteristic of this will be humility, as residents and community organisations do not want forceful intervention but rather a more personal touch that provides them the tools, resources and time for people to help themselves. To achieve this, the strategy will need to use new engagement approaches that value what is strong in communities, not what is wrong. This will mean using a strengths-based approach that respects and builds on residents' self-worth, autonomy and resilience, and uses methods (like local area co-ordination, community visioning events, etc) to listen locally, hear appreciatively, understand practically, and act collaboratively. Not all residents and organisations will feel confident or comfortable being forthright or asking for help, so engagements will need to build in time and space to forge trust.

Hyper-local by default

By using different engagement methods in the community, and learning iteratively from the process, it is hoped that trusting relationships will deliver continuous channels of communication at a hyper-local level. The strategy will utilise the research, data, and local feedback and evidence available in this channel to inform how to better target interventions in small localities where the need is greatest, the conditions are well understood, and the links to impact are strongest.

SECTION 6 – SURREY FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO CHILD POVERTY

Strategic Framework

The scope set by cabinet serves to provide the strategic framework under which activity can take place using a whole council approach within each of the four Organisational Strategy Priority Objectives. While many initiatives and projects are already underway in SCC service areas, teams will also be examining the evidence for new ideas and ways of working. This frame will ensure all existing and new work is properly aligned, communicated, and – crucially – monitored together to determine impact on reducing poverty in Surrey. However, beyond monitoring through this lens, ultimate accountability governance for delivery will remain with the respective county-wide strategic partnership boards (the Health and Wellbeing Board, the One Surrey Growth Board and the Greener Futures Board), with poverty work embedded into these delivery plans.

Looking at successful practice in other local authority strategies, there are a number of themes which will be initial areas of focus in determining where Surrey can best implement recognised national best practice at a local level. Within these areas, business cases will be made to bring forward new or adapted service improvements, projects, and partnership initiatives for potential addition to the strategy including (*but not limited to*):

Empowered and Thriving Communities

Governance

- The Surrey Forum will act to better align and co-ordinate the work of the county-wide partnership boards, strengthen collaboration between partners, and embed new ways of working to empower communities. This formalises previously informal arrangements bringing together a range of leaders from the public, private and voluntary, community and faith sectors to work together on cross-cutting community-led action on issues like poverty.

Childcare & Early Years education

- There are many parents or carers who do not feel they can access employment because their caring responsibilities take up core working hours or are unpredictable and cannot be planned for/worked around a job. While interventions on childcare support and early years education work to narrow the attainment gap, raise hope and aspiration, and support flexibility and affordability for working parents seeking new and better work, these services must be made more approachable and supportive.
- Moreover, more can be done to increase the uptake of Funded Early Education for two-year-olds (FEET), FSMs in schools, and involvement in Schools Alliance for Excellence (SAfE) to raise educational attainment for disadvantaged groups.

Advice on income, benefits, job-seeking

- There is a case to examine how to improve advice on (and county-wide coverage and quality of) 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 to make the most of their funds.

- Because small changes can have a major impact when providing practical support to access opportunities – for instance, tutorials on processing a bill, CV workshops, computer literacy assistance, putting free Wi-Fi in particular areas of our community to access information, and free training courses online – more emphasis on advice will be a key area of research.

Marketing of support services

- The council can vary its approach of services, including through means like social prescribing and local area coordination, to address differences in resident need. Sometimes this will be focusing on specific places (such as individuals at food banks), and other times it will be changes to language (appreciating cultural difference, or the difference of pressures when poverty is intergenerational vs circumstantial).

Utilising community insight

- SCC will partner 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.
- Country services will seek to improve relations with schools regarding how information is shared about family circumstances, and how support services are shaped and communicated to suit different family needs.

Making the most of funds, assets & opportunities

- More can be done to harness 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. There is also a requisite need to provide these community organisations with greater insight to guide their activities based on the knowledge they have provided to the system leads.
- Better use of community venues (schools/churches/centres) will play a significant role, trying to use them in ways led by communities, focused on how to support and help them, and opening up real dialogue on their terms.
- More work will be launched to examine how volunteering opportunities are promoted and coordinated to ensure that there are local channels to get those who are not or who cannot work engaged and established in contributing to their local area.

Growing a Sustainable Economy

Governance

- The One Surrey Growth Board recognises the importance of ensuring that the benefits of growth are available to everyone in Surrey and has a priority focused on 'maximising opportunities within a balanced, inclusive economy'.
- The Surrey Skills Leadership Forum (SSLF) is leading on this area of work on behalf of the Growth Board with stakeholder representation from employers, colleges, universities, LEPs, districts & boroughs and inclusion groups. The Forum is charged with setting the vision and leading on a multi-agency response to improve skills, employment and inclusion outcomes in Surrey. This work will use an evidence-led

approach to understand future employment demand which can then be used to improve the skills system in Surrey; including for those groups who find it difficult to enter the system and progress towards employment.

- In order to achieve tangible, sustainable outcomes for our priority groups, it is essential that we work using a data-driven, cross cutting approach. Given the evident intersection between socio-economic outcomes and wider determinants of health, SCC and the system will need to embed cross agency working between the strategic priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Board and wider strategic partnerships. One way of doing this will be to use evidence to identify shared communities of priority, to then better understand the issues they face, working together to then design appropriate interventions.

Tailored support back into work

- SCC has a clear leadership role in developing and driving outcomes from strategic partnerships with key agencies who hold the remit to address child and family poverty. One example of this is with the emerging Partnership Agreement being developed with DWP. By understanding our joint priority areas and establishing agreed areas of focus for channelling resources, we will be able to support JobCentres to target service provision locally.
- Getting people into work cannot be tokenistic, the focus should instead be on ensuring people are finding sustainable, secure employment. People might have multi-layered issues (low confidence, childcare, etc) holding them back from engaging with further training and work experience, and support must appreciate those pressures to avoid inadvertently limiting aspirations – without proper training, support practitioners can find it difficult to engage empathetically and methodically.
- A greater focus is needed on linking support toward sustainable employment pathways; appreciating the necessary steps of confidence-building, raising hope & aspiration, and personalised assistance on issues like housing or debt management which impact on secure opportunities after a period of under- or unemployment.
- There may be cause for 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 at all ages.

Reviewing employment practices

- SCC will look at advocating the use of a potential Surrey-specific appropriate living wage and opportunities for job creation as an employer, procurer of services from local/national suppliers, and partner to local business.
- Recruitment practices will play a vital role, with the potential to change the culture to recognise desire, attitude, values and behaviours and then provide support once in work to supplement skills that need refining.
- The council will look to provide good quality work experience, placements, volunteering opportunities to gain valuable experience and that lead on to paid work or skills training opportunities. Engaging with Surrey business
- The system can also look to maximise and scale up Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activity, to offer pathways to employment for families living in poverty.

Housing & homelessness

- Given the relative high cost of living in Surrey, particularly in the private rented market, there is a need to address rising costs and a lack of available affordable

housing causing families to fall behind on rent and risk eviction. Surrey's housing strategy must continue to develop with a view to ensuring affordable housing is at the core of provision.

- For those residents who face housing instability and homelessness resulting from lack of appropriate accommodation options, there is the potential to build on recent initiatives during the pandemic. For example, work has been progressed through the Homeless Multi-Agency Group coordinated by Public Health which has utilised the £1.5 million COMF funding for homelessness to establish housing cabins that can be accessed county-wide by all housing teams. In particular, more coordination such as this between the county council and district/borough authorities could ensure that intelligence is shared and the best possible interventions on homelessness are targeted.

Tackling Health Inequality

Governance

- The Surrey Health and Well-being Board will continue to steer community-led action to reduce health inequalities, with priority three of the Strategy now stating its aim as 'supporting people to reach their potential by addressing the wider determinants of health'. The new outcomes for Priority 3 are:
 - People's basic needs are met (food security, poverty, housing strategy)
 - Children, young people and adults are empowered in their communities
 - People access training and employment opportunities within a sustainable economy
 - People are safe and feel safe (e.g. domestic violence, safeguarding)
 - The benefits of healthy environments for people are valued and maximised (incl. through transport/land use planning)
- The Health and Wellbeing Board has also committed to working more collaboratively and creatively with those specific neighbourhoods where health outcomes and their causes are poorer – additional work to build trust and support community action will be focused on these specific key localities.

Marketing of support services

- There is a need to explore changing the communication around and accessibility of mental and physical health support, with increased focus on accessing those services geared toward prevention and early intervention.
- There is potential to better tailor disability support to more explicitly link and address the unique needs around financial hardship for people with a disability.

Sharing information

- The collaborative relationship with the NHS can be improved to better share information on how the system identifies and resources to support those in financial hardship as a wider determinant of health.
- SCC work alongside districts and boroughs could be developed further to make the most of our collective resources, knowledge, and networks to support homeless residents and people sleeping rough as key wider determinant of health and resultant inequalities.

Harnessing partnership arrangements to best effect

- Programmes such as First 1000 days and Helping Families will continue to focus on early intervention and family resilience; looking for new means to identify and support health inequalities which are often linked to signs of poverty.
- Active Surrey's Movement for Change can be supported in new ways as it seeks to target the health conditions that could be more associated with minority groups and those in deprived circumstances such as poverty.
- Changing Future's programme, including Surrey Adults Matter approach, will continue to support and develop new assistance for those experiencing multiple disadvantage and incorporating system change to address the barriers commonly being experienced by persons in these circumstances.
- An important factor will be the council's response to the updated Surrey Community Safety Agreement which makes a clear link between health inequalities and community safety, with Police acknowledgment of victims and perpetrators of crime often having health and social care needs that may stem from their experiences of deprivation which need to be addressed with community partner support.
- The Mental Health Partnership Board will continue to look at the connection between poverty and mental health needs as it seeks to improve the system of support. Changes to services should be expected to adapt to the evolving understanding of multiple deprivation and its cyclical relationship with mental health.

Care profession

- Much of the healthcare workforce is at the bottom end of the pay spectrum and therefore at risk of in-work poverty, but this is influenceable by the council. The council could try to reshape and reform social care, placing greater prominence on workforce, better remuneration, and working with district/borough councils on cost of housing and cost of fuel for care workers.
- A skills gap exists where the health and care sectors seek previous experience in the workforce, but this is difficult to achieve in entry-level jobs and the council needs to advocate clearer pathways and appreciation of lived experience of providing care.
- There is also a role to assist recruitment in the system – ensuring health care services are more accessible to people in poverty or lower paid jobs, or helping employers think about employees with chronic conditions that will need supportive management and how to provide that support.

Enabling a Greener Future

Governance

- The Greener Futures Board will continue to adapt its delivery plans to include areas where its priorities overlap with the circumstances of residents who find themselves in financial need. In many cases, until these circumstances are improved, aims for a greener Surrey cannot be achieved (e.g. finding greener solutions to end fuel poverty in households reliant only on high-emission, high-cost options).

Travel & transport

- Fine tuning our active travel plans and public transportation planning to ensure that personal cost impacts are better reflected, and ensuring that there will be reliable and inexpensive public transport options to facilitate access to education and work for all residents.

- Ensuring infrastructure, from transport to public community assets / green space, is more accessible and open to the most vulnerable residents – currently ‘needs’ aren’t always well factored into planning. The council could continue to develop a more sophisticated offer for engaging with communities about travel needs and responding to those needs in its travel strategies.

Fuel & energy

- 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 and having to live in homes with poor fuel efficiency.

Campaigns on waste

- Making better use of partnerships to improve campaigns on costly waste and how to avoid household waste.

Greener skills & jobs

- SCC can act as a convenor and leader to address the highlighted skills shortages for future needs (such as net zero agenda or getting rid of diesel/boilers) because of shortages of particular trades and skills within Surrey.
- The council has a role within adult education, where potentially people working in similar trades could be retrained for green jobs gaps, whilst supporting other agendas (greener futures) simultaneously.

SECTION 7 – CONCLUSION

The way forward

As poverty is a rising, often-hidden, and increasingly complex multi-layered issue in Surrey – both before and during the pandemic – it is incumbent on SCC and the Surrey system to act to ensure not only that urgent immediate resident needs are met, but that programmes of work are put in place to target the root causes of child poverty for the longer term to reduce its incidence.

The approach and framework set forth in this document describe the beginnings of a community-led strategy, with input from across the system, including county council leadership that draws in best practice themes and initiatives from across the country. The road ahead to reducing poverty in Surrey for the long-term will be difficult and require commitment for consistent implementation for many years across many varied areas of policy and service area delivery. However, with that commitment from the council and partners across the community, real change in the circumstances of the lives of Surrey residents in real financial need is possible.

At county council level, the framework described will drive forward analysis of new and adapted projects and initiatives under the four Organisational Strategy Priority Objectives. Officers of the council are already compiling evidence on best practice and cost/benefit appraisals to inform cabinet on where decisions could make the most difference to support children living in relative poverty.

At system level, meeting the needs of those in poverty is now firmly embedded in refreshed Priority 3 of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The Health and Wellbeing Board has recently approved the exploration of a system-wide adoption of the [Health in All Policies](#) approach, through which any impacts of cross-departmental policies on those who are socio-economically disadvantaged could be central. This will build on SCC and Surrey Heartlands commitment to include those who experience socioeconomic disadvantage in their Equality Impact Assessments.

The Health and Well-being Board have also now identified five key localities that rank lowest in Surrey according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation for prioritised resourcing for community capacity building. This work will begin to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of the new HWB Strategy Priority Population – ‘People living in geographic areas which experience the poorest health outcomes in Surrey’.

Over the course of 2022, SCC and its partners across the system will work to invigorate community engagement to truly understand residents needs on financial hardship at local level, and begin the process of co-designing interventions to change these circumstances. The emerging Surrey strategy on poverty is building on a foundation of strong buy-in from county-wide local authorities, public agencies, VCFS organisations, and resident voices. This foundation will ensure that the solutions taken forward are truly grounded in empathy, evidence of impact on the root causes of poverty, and feedback of what actually makes a difference to residents’ lives at local community level.