DRAFT ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

Report by Service Director Customer & Communities

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

25 February 2021

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 **This report presents for approval the Scottish Borders Council Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy that has been developed following a motion by Councillor Tatler in September 2020 and sets out the next steps that Scottish Borders Council and Partners plan to take in tackling Poverty in the Scottish Borders.**

1.2 A Working Group (including agreed Terms of Reference) was set up to review the extent of poverty in the Scottish Borders.

1.3 The Working Group (including agreed Terms of Reference) in creating the draft Strategy took account of –

- Economic poverty and income
- Fuel poverty
- Housing poverty
- Food poverty
- Impact on family and community health and wellbeing
- Digital poverty

1.4 The Council is continuing to respond to the current Covid-19 pandemic and working with our communities through the Community Assistance Hubs. The learning from this work should be taken into account and how ongoing arrangements evolve.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 **I recommend that Council:**

(a) **Approves the Scottish Borders Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy as detailed at Appendix 1.**

(b) **Agrees to proceed to Public Consultation to take place from the beginning of March to the end of May 2021.**

(c) **Agrees that the Anti-Poverty Working Group will develop an approach to public consultation and create a Final Strategy and Action Plan for approval.**

(d)   **Agrees to receive a further report in June 2021 from the Service Director Customer & Communities which will present a final Anti-Poverty Strategy and an Action Plan for approval.**

3   BACKGROUND

3.1   In September 2020, Scottish Borders Council approved a motion by Councillor Tatler for a Member/Officer Working Group to be set up to develop a draft Anti-Poverty Strategy for consideration for approval at February 2021 Council.

3.2   A Working Group (including agreed Terms of Reference) was set up to review the extent of poverty in the Scottish Borders and take account of –

- • Economic poverty and income
- • Fuel poverty
- • Housing poverty
- • Food poverty
- • Impact on family and community health and wellbeing
- • Digital poverty

3.3   The Working Group used poverty definitions from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation - 'Poverty is when your resources are well below our minimum needs' and 'Poverty means not being able to heat your home, pay your rent or buy essentials (e.g., a winter coat for a child, a fridge) for you or your children.'

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)

3.4   The Working Group have taken a forward thinking, sustainable approach to the development of the Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy. The approach is outlined below:

(a)   Examining relevant data to agree the best approach for the Scottish Borders.

(b)   Analysing information to reach robust conclusions, examine options and consider costs of poverty.

(c)   Identifying where support is needed most and where additional resources may be useful to tackle poverty.

(d)   Worked with other organisations and a number of other partners including Citizens Advice Borders, Registered Social Landlords, Service Managers, the Third Sector Interface, and other voluntary organisations to ensure that appropriate issues were identified and included in the Strategy.

(e)   Identifying best practice and the approach that had been taken to tackling Anti-Poverty in other local authority areas

(f)   Reflecting on a variety of specific Covid-19 impact reports that are being published nationally, as well as Scottish Borders Council's response to the Pandemic.

3.5 The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People announced the creation of a Social Renewal Advisory Board in June 2020. The Board was tasked with making proposals to renew Scotland, as it emerges from the pandemic, focused on reducing poverty and disadvantage, advancing equality and embedding a human rights-based approach. The final report 'If not now, when?' was published in January 2021. The Anti-Poverty Working Group recognises this important report and the 'Calls to Action' to address the harms created by the pandemic and the inequalities facing people and communities, and will consider its relevance to the Scottish Borders in the Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan.

4 STRATEGY CONTENT

4.1 The Working Group agreed a vision -

'We want a Scottish Borders where no-one lives in Poverty and we want everyone to be able to achieve their full potential and feel healthy, happy and valued'

4.2 Local context is set out in the Strategy and provides justification for the document. Examples are shown below. A full Picture of Poverty in the Scottish Borders is shown in Appendix 2, and provides a key evidence led baseline on which the draft has been developed. Detailed below are some of the key challenges:

(a) In 2020, the **median gross weekly pay** (workplace based) for full time workers in the Scottish Borders was £481, **£111 below** the £593 for Scotland or **81%**.

(b) Between November 2019 and November 2020, the number of people claiming **Out-of-Work benefits** aged 16 to 64 **increased** by **95%** from 1,805 (2.7%) to 3,525 (5.2%) respectively.

(c) Around **29%** of all households in the Scottish Borders are fuel poor, equivalent to approximately **16,000 households**.

(d) There was a **20%** increase in free school meal awards from **1,659** in September 2019 to **2,075** in September 2020.

(e) In 2019-20 the Citizens Advice services in the Scottish Borders had **5,125** clients, gave advice 21,950 times, and gained over **£3.1** million for clients.

(f) **13%** of the Scottish Borders are unable to access decent broadband (USO) compared to **4%** for Scotland, this varies across the Scottish Borders.

(g) **81.3%** of households have home internet access in the Scottish Borders compared to **85%** for Scotland.

4.3 Challenges and Opportunities in tackling Poverty in the Scottish Borders have been identified. These will be used to work and consult with people to understand the issues involved and to improve service design and delivery to make a positive change for individuals, families, and communities. Key challenges and opportunities include:

(a)   The impact of Covid-19 is now an issue in the Scottish Borders. For those already living in poverty, the impact of Covid-19 is likely to make things worse for them, whilst there are people experiencing poverty for the first time. Scottish Borders Council has a Response and Recovery Board in place which meets regularly to respond to and make plans to assist those in need. A Covid-19 Vulnerability index has been developed which pinpoints areas where changes to service delivery will make a difference. This is used by the Council in its response.

(b)   The rurality factors of the Scottish Borders present a challenge. Geography, ageing demographic, income deprivation, fuel deprivation, digital access, poor broadband, and food security are all issues which are taken into account in the Strategy. Access to affordable and timely transport and equitable access to all services are part of the rurality challenge too, and actions will be developed in the Action Plan to address these issues.

(c)   Digital exclusion is an area of concern also. The rurality factor contributes to difficulties around access to good broadband and mobile coverage, however there are real opportunities for people to get online through the Connecting Scotland Project. To date over 700 devices have been issued to individuals, families, care leavers and vulnerable people. These devices provide invaluable support to people. The Council's Digital Strategy (which is presented to Council on 25.02.21) will make a valuable contribution to reducing digital exclusion and improving inclusivity by focussing on achieving improved citizen outcomes.

4.4   The Council, along with all public bodies continues to face significant challenges as it aims to provide the best possible services within the resources available. The adoption of a longer term timeframe for financial planning has previously enabled the Council to plan the delivery of service changes across financial years through modernising services, investing in new technology, and in developing a range of strategic partnerships to provide longer term benefits.

4.5   The Working Group have set out 6 themes and 7 outcomes in the Strategy. The themes are structured around the 'pockets, prospects, places' measurement framework adopted by the Scottish Government Child Poverty Strategy with additions of 'people,' 'partnerships' and 'pathways.' Outcomes shown against each theme will form the basis of the Action Plan.

5   APPROACH TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION

5.1   It is recognised that this draft Strategy has been developed from a mainly internal perspective to date, and that full consultation with partners, communities and other organisations will be required in order to enable the draft Strategy and Action Plan to be brought back to Council in June 2021 for final approval.

5.2 The approach to this consultation will be co-produced with Third Sector and other partners to ensure that a combination of different types of engagement are undertaken. Whilst some effects of poverty are widely known and evidenced by a range of data, it is those who are experiencing some of the hidden effects of poverty that we are seeking to engage with, and what actions could be taken to alleviate the impact of poverty and support those individuals better.

5.3 It is vital to involve people with direct lived experience in the development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy. Their input is key to informing decision making and ensuring that appropriate actions are included in the Action Plan which have a real impact and will make a difference to their lives. Options under consideration include a direct lived experience online forum, a Survey open to the public and/or a targeted audience and engagement with specific stakeholders such as the Third Sector.

6 DELIVERY OF THE ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

6.1 The delivery of the Anti-Poverty Strategy will focus on an Action Plan which will be developed by the Anti-Poverty Working Group and include work that is already being undertaken to address poverty. The Action Plan will be added to as feedback from the public consultation and the proposed lived experienced forum is better understood.

6.2 The Anti-Poverty Working Group will initially develop an approach to both consultation and establishing a lived experience forum.

6.3 In parallel to this work, the Working Group will also create a draft Action Plan. The proposed Action Plan will:
   • Be key to delivery of the Strategy
   • Involve the Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership, other partners and organisations who are also contributing to reducing poverty
   • Be based on themes and designed to achieve the desired outcomes set out in the Draft Strategy
   • Reflect identified challenges and opportunities
   • Be a live document that will be added to as the picture of poverty is better understood in relation to the impact of the ongoing pandemic
   • Reflect the outcome of consultation and the proposed direct lived experience forum

6.4 This Action Plan is not intended to replace work that is already being undertaken across the Scottish Borders to reduce poverty. There are a number of key strategies and actions that are already being undertaken and are contributing to reducing poverty in the Scottish Borders. (Appendix 3) A specific Child Poverty Action Report and Plan for 2020/21 is in place and many of the actions contained in it will contribute to achieving the outcomes set out in this strategy. This overarching Strategy aims to create a strategic approach in how the Council, with its partners, work together to maximise the opportunities and work in partnership to overcome the significant challenges in reducing poverty.

6.5 In March 2020, five Community Assistance Hubs were set up across the Borders to work with resilient community teams and other third sector organisations to co-ordinate the emergency response to the pandemic. The value of this work and the response within our communities has been invaluable and recognised as an example of excellent partnership working. This Strategy will build on that partnership work.

6.6 Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy will be carried out by regular progress reporting of the Action Plan using existing measurement indicators where they exist and developing new indicators where there is a need. The longer-term effectiveness of the Strategy and Action Plan will be assessed to inform future strategy development.

Other key strategies and plans

7 TIMELINE

7.1 The proposed timeline for the Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy is as follows:

(a) The Draft Strategy is presented to Council on 25th February 2021 for approval.

(b) The Anti-Poverty Working Group will plan the approach to the consultation and lived experience online forum from 25th February 2021.

(c) Public Consultation and other engagement mechanisms are held between March and May 2021.

(d) The outcome of the consultation will be evaluated, and the findings presented to Council in June 2021 to enable the Strategy and Action Plan to be fully approved.

(e) An Annual Progress Report will be presented to Council in March 2022.

8 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 **Financial**

There are no specific costs attached to any of the recommendations in this report. Budget provision is already reflected in the Council's budget which supports the anti-poverty agenda.

8.2 **Risks and Mitigations**

Risks associated with this report relate to the deepening problem of poverty from the longer-term impact of COVID-19.

The Action Plan that will be developed will provide a number of mitigations to these risks, and effective evaluation and monitoring processes will be key to evidencing the impact of the Action Plan.

8.3 **Integrated Impact Assessment**

There are no equalities issues associated with this report.

8.4 **Acting Sustainably**

There are no economic, social, or environmental effects associated with this report.

8.5 **Carbon Management**

There are no effects on carbon emissions as a result of this report.

8.6 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

There are no changes to the Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation as a result of this report.

9 CONSULTATION

9.1 The Executive Director (Finance & Regulatory), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Service Director HR & Communications, the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the Final Report.

Approved by

Jenni Craig
Service Director Customer and Communities Signature ……………………………

Authors

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Janice Robertson	Strategic Planning & Policy Manager
Shona Smith	Communities & Partnerships Manager

Background Papers: N/A

Previous Minute Reference: N/A

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Janice Robertson can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at Scottish Borders Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, Melrose, Tel 01835 824000, performance@scotborders.gov.uk.