

**Scottish Borders**  
**Local Child Poverty Action Report**  
**Annual Progress Report 2020/21**

DRAFT

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## **Background**

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 sets out the Scottish Government's statement of intent to eradicate child poverty in Scotland by 2030.

Although the greatest impact on child poverty will occur through nationally set policies and strategies, it is recognised that local agencies and communities have much to contribute to achieving the outcomes desired. As a result, the Act requires Local Authorities and Health Boards to jointly prepare a Local Child Poverty Action Plan Report and an Annual Progress Report. The annual progress report should describe activities undertaken and planned locally to contribute towards the child poverty targets set out in the Act.

This report for 2020/21 is the third Annual Report for the Scottish Borders and provides Scottish Government with an update on progress against activities within the Action Plan. The Child Poverty Planning Group and the Community Planning Partnership thank all partners for their input to the report.

## **Accountability and Governance**

The Child Poverty Planning Group (CPPG) manages the implementation of the Plan and is accountable to the Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership (CPP). The CPPG is a strategic group with senior multi-agency membership.

The CPPG reports to the CPP through the Children and Young People's Strategic Leadership Group (CYPSLG) on the following:

- Key strategic priorities in relation to statutory requirements and local needs
- Progress reports and updates against the high level priorities contained within the Child Poverty Plan, including annual reports for submission to Scottish Government
- The group also reports at least annually to the governance bodies of the key partners e.g. Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders Board etc.

## **Participation and Engagement**

During 2020/21 relationships have continued with stakeholders who have an interest in eradicating Child Poverty.

A multi-agency Child Poverty Planning Group meets regularly on the Child Poverty Agenda and is made up of representatives from Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders as well as the Third Sector and RSLs. Group members have made significant contributions to this report.

# What is poverty?

According to the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation \(JRF\)](#), Poverty is when your resources are well below your minimum needs.

## How does JRF define poverty in the UK?

Poverty affects millions of people in the UK. Poverty means not being able to heat your home, pay your rent, or buy the essentials for you or your children. It means waking up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty, and impossible decisions about money. It means facing marginalisation – and even discrimination – because of your financial circumstances. The constant stress it causes can lead to problems that deprive people of the chance to play a full part in society.

## Child Poverty

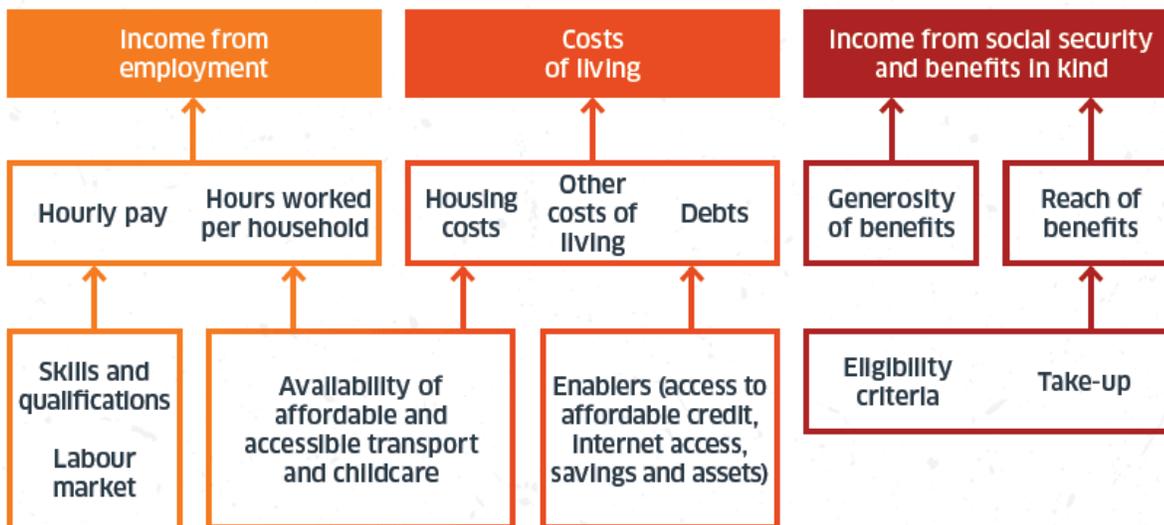
Around one in four children in Scotland lives in poverty.

We find this figure unacceptable, especially in a modern, thriving country like ours. That is why we are working hard to reduce child poverty.

<https://www.gov.scot/policies/poverty-and-social-justice/child-poverty/>

## Drivers of Child Poverty

The direct drivers of poverty fall in to three main categories – income from employment, costs of living and income from social security. The relationship of these drivers to wider thematic areas is summarised below.



Source: [Tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022: annex 2 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

## Key risk groups and targeted interventions

Child poverty action reports are expected to describe measures taken in relation to children living in households where income and/or expenditure are adversely affected as a consequence of a member or members in a household having one or more protected characteristics. The national Child Poverty Delivery Plan also identifies certain priority groups to be targeted as beneficiaries (see Figure 1 below), and notes the need to take account of local geography and demographic profile. For the Scottish Borders, rurality is a key factor. There is also a requirement to report on income maximisation measures taken in the area to provide pregnant women and families with children with information, advice and assistance about eligibility for financial support; and assistance to apply for financial support. This includes work by the NHS Borders and partners to embed financial inclusion referral pathways in health care settings, as well as other settings.

*Figure 1 - Nationally identified priority groups at high risk of poverty*



## National Context

Scottish Government – Current Child Poverty Targets, measures and figures

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 does not specifically define ‘poverty’, instead it uses four income-based targets as measures.

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/child-poverty-scotland-bill>

In March 2021 the Scottish Government updated the measures used to assess child poverty in Scotland<sup>1</sup>, the table below shows the results for the most recent two years along with the 2023 and 2030 targets.

Child Poverty Measures For Scotland	Previous Statistics	Latest statistics	2023 target	2030 target
% of children in relative poverty	23% (2018/19)	26% (2019/20)	18%	10%
% of children in absolute poverty	20% (2018/19)	23% (2019/20)	14%	5%
% of children in low income + material deprivation	12% (2018/19)	12% (2019/20)	8%	5%
% of children in persistent poverty after housing costs	15% (2014-2018)	16% (2015-2019)	8%	5%

Source: <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/cpupdate.html>

## Scottish Government Measures Definitions

### Relative Poverty

Scottish Government defines relative poverty as: “a household earning less than 60% of average UK household income **for the year (after housing costs), taking account of the size and composition of the household.**”

### Absolute Poverty

Scottish Government defines absolute poverty as a household with “less than 60% of average UK household income **for the financial year beginning 1 April 2010**”

### Low Income and Material Deprivation

Scottish Government defines “low income and material deprivation” as “less than 70% of average UK household income for the reference year” and “material deprivation” as “when families are unable to afford three or more items out of a list of basic necessities”.

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<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Government references the Family Resources Survey and Understanding Society Survey in the [publication](#), this is separate to the DWP/HMRC [children in low income families statistics](#).

## **Persistent Poverty**

Scottish Government defines persistent child poverty as where a child has lived in relative poverty for three out of the last four years. The Scottish Government target states that less than 5% of children should live in persistently-poor households by 2030.

## **Food Security**

In 2019/20, 25% of Scottish children lived in households that did not enjoy “high” food security. 7% of children lived with “very low” food security. This rises to 14% of children who are living in relative poverty and 15% of children living in absolute poverty.

## **National Context in Relation to Covid-19 and Child Poverty**

Appendix 1(a) sets out some national findings in relation the drivers of child poverty, also taking into account the impact of Covid-19. Information about the nationally identified priority groups at high risk of poverty is also shown.

## **Public Health Scotland**

Public Health Scotland was formed in April 2020 and promotes six national Public Health Priorities. These priorities are intended to support national and local partners across Scotland to work together to improve healthy life expectancy and reduce health inequalities in our communities.

- Priority 1 - A Scotland where we live in vibrant, healthy and safe places and communities
- Priority 2 - A Scotland where we flourish in our early years
- Priority 3 - A Scotland where we have good mental wellbeing
- Priority 4 - A Scotland where we reduce the use of and harm from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- Priority 5 - A Scotland where we have a sustainable, inclusive economy with equality of outcomes for all
- Priority 6 - A Scotland where we eat well, have a healthy weight and are physically active

## **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Child Poverty**

In spring 2021 the Scottish Parliament unanimously supported the UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Bill – which places a duty on public bodies to respect and protect children’s rights in all the work that they do. The Bill also says that public authorities must not act in a way that is incompatible with the UNCRC requirements.

It is said that a Children’s Rights framework ought to be used by the Scottish Government to shape their work towards achieving their targets as set out in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. The Children’s Rights framework would allow consideration to be given to the barriers presented by policy areas that may not immediately seem relevant to child poverty, for example, housing, education, health, transport, employment, discrimination, disability and family life.

Most directly the UNCRC says that children and young people:

- Have a right to the best health possible, this includes adequate and nutritious food (article 24)
- Have the right to social security and for this to be fully realised (article 26)
- Have the right to a standard of living that allows them to develop physically, mentally, spiritually and socially (article 27)

## Local Context

The need to tackle damaging impacts of child poverty is in sharper focus since the Covid-19 pandemic, and the wide reaching impacts are yet to be fully understood. The impact of Covid-19 is likely to be unequal and may affect children and young people and their families who are already experiencing hardship more than others.

Set out below are some of the actions taken and the challenges faced during 2020/21 by Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders and Partners.

## The 2020/21 Action Plan Progress Report

Good progress has been made against the actions set out in the 2020/21 Action Plan despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is shown in detail in Appendix 1(b). Highlights include:

- Services have adapted working practices to enable them to continue to offer food, support, employment opportunities, digital devices and many other initiatives, as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions
- The Borders Additional Needs Group continued to provide weekly Additional Support Needs (ASN) Youth Groups to 14-19 year olds to support the transition out of education and enhance employability opportunities for ASN young people.
- The Community and Learning Development (CLD) service switched their support to parents to online, telephone, and one to one outdoor meetings so that they could continue to help with issues raised such as provision of free school meals, looking after children's needs whilst shielding, domestic abuse and many others.
- The Parental Employability Support programme has already had success with 35 referrals since October 2020, with some parents already gaining employment.
- Monetary gains for those claiming benefits increased in 2020/21 despite a lower number of referrals due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- New homes were built, and whilst others were paused due to the pandemic, most have started up again.
- Youth work holiday programmes were delivered, despite reduced capacity and opportunity due to COVID-19, and were enhanced by online activities, including cooking workshops.
- Students at Borders College were given online mentoring support.
- Borders College disseminated in excess of £350k in hardship and discretionary funding to students to support living costs and mitigate effects of COVID-19 restrictions.
- The Connecting Scotland programme supported vulnerable people online, helping 382 families, 65 care leavers and 34 other vulnerable people.
- The Borders Housing Network secured £450k from the Scottish Government's Social Housing Fuel Support Fund. This allowed the four housing associations to support those in fuel debt.
- At least 250 young people were supported through the receipt of food parcels by third sector youth organisations throughout 2020/21.

As well as the progress shown in Appendix 1(b), we have some case studies shown in Appendix 1(f) which demonstrate the wide range of activities undertaken by services to help to alleviate child poverty in the Scottish Borders.

## Local Covid-19 position

Income from Employment	Job Loss	<p>Youth Pathway to Employment, involving Borders College, DYW, SDS, Youth Borders and SBC was designed and developed in anticipation of need from learners who were at risk of not having a positive destination post-school, particularly those who would have left school for employment.</p> <p>Live Borders was unable to provide work experience opportunities as majority of staff were furloughed.</p> <p>Unemployment figures in the Scottish Borders rose from 1755 in December 2019 to 3505 by December 2020. The unemployment figures, based on the Claimant Count, rose to 3615 as at 30 April 2021.</p>
Income from Employment	Loss of income	<p>Within the Scottish Borders 3300 workers were furloughed as at 31 October 2020. By 28 February 2021 the number increased to 7300 Scottish Borders workers and then reduced to 6300 by 31 March 2021.</p>
Income from Benefits	Benefits	<p>Couples on benefits of £281 per week with two children after housing costs were £120 per week short of the 60% median income poverty level of around £400 per week. In order to surpass the poverty line each parent would need to work 22 hours per week at minimum wage or have their benefits increased by 40% if unemployed. (The Scottish Child Payment per week for aged 6 and under increased benefits by an average of 5%).</p> <p>Within Scottish Borders a single parent with two children receiving benefits of £238 per week after housing costs was £60 per week short of the 60% median income poverty level of around £300 per week. To ensure the weekly income reached the poverty line the single parent would need to be employed for seven hours per week at minimum wage or without employment, have their benefits increased by 25%.</p> <p>The referral e-form to the Financial Inclusion Team was delayed during the pandemic and shall be introduced in 2021-2022.</p>
Costs of living	Impact on families	<p>Scottish Borders Council Social Work Department continued contact with families and reported increased numbers of referrals from families not previously known who were facing emotional and financial issues due to the pandemic.</p> <p>The Community and Learning Development (CLD) Team at Scottish Borders Council supported 94 parents between April and June 2020 with various issues including financial inclusion, food insecurity, and children's needs, and held cooking demonstrations.</p> <p>Live Borders facilities were closed from March 2020 impacting on free access to services and Holiday Programmes were postponed. The delivery of usually face to face Holiday Programmes were converted and provided virtually and in creative ways by partners involved in the Joint Health Improvement Team.</p> <p>With the closure of schools and the impact of losing sight of children and young people, hidden poverty and the pressures pushing families into greater need have been highlighted. On reopening the pressures to provide school uniforms increased.</p> <p>Third sector youth work organisations supported young people with free online and in-person activities throughout 2020/21: including craft sessions, photography, cooking and baking, youth media, day trips, mountain biking and sports.</p>

Costs of living	Housing and household costs	<p>£350,000 in hardship and discretionary funding to students was delivered by Borders College.</p> <p>Although the Financial Inclusion Pilot to be held in Galashiels Health Centre's midwifery clinic was postponed due to Covid-19, NHS Health Visitors enquired at each core visit about financial inclusion.</p> <p>BHA - Fuel debt of tenants increased by 36%.</p> <p>The Early Years Centre in Galashiels used produce to top up 300 food parcels for children and families.</p> <p>SBHA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No-one evicted in 13 month period</li> <li>• Had 66 persons lodged in court, engaging with 60 with repayment arrangements introduced. Prior to the pandemic the figures would have been reversed.</li> </ul>
Costs of living	Food insecurity	<p>Foodbank/Foodshare outlets across the Scottish Borders increased from 17 to 25. Supported financially via the Financial Inclusion Fund, these means have included the introduction of the Eyemouth Food Partnership which is now being considered as a pilot for expansion Borders wide. The alliance between the Joint Improvement Health Board with Berwickshire Association of Voluntary Services (BAVS), and funding from SBC, has contributed to ensuring children and families have access to food networks. The Community Larder, funded by the National Lottery allocation to BAVS and the Financial Inclusion Fund is a further initiative utilised by families in the Berwickshire area. BAVS distributed £65,000 in community response. Borders College supported students experiencing food adversity with £450 of supermarket vouchers.</p> <p>Third sector youth organisations provided support to 253 young people with food parcels and through significant contributions from community based youth groups: including Cheviot Hub, TD1 Youth Club, Rowland's, Tweeddale Youth Action and Connect Berwickshire. Collectively an estimated 10,000 food parcels were dispersed to households.</p> <p>Burnfoot Community Futures - From 27.05.2020 – 29.06.2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distributed 298 recipes</li> <li>• 228 persons benefitted</li> <li>• Distributed 296 ready meals</li> </ul> <p>Single parents with a number of children were discouraged from shopping by some supermarkets. Deliveries from Foodshare and support from Early Years Centres provided life lines to families with young children in the Scottish Borders. Over 500 food parcels were delivered during the first 15 weeks of lockdown.</p>
Costs of living	Digital exclusion	<p>Prior to the emergence of COVID-19, timescales to deploy devices to teachers and students were already challenging, and subsequently due to the pandemic needs heightened and deployments were completed ahead of original timescales. During 2019-2020 devices were provided to teachers and students in all secondary settings by March 2020, three months ahead of schedule. During May 2020 540 iPads were distributed over a three day period to primary school teachers and a further 3,600 iPads delivered to the homes of students based within primaries 6 and 7 and S1 to deliver home school learning from 11<sup>th</sup> August 2020. This particular rollout was eleven months ahead of the original programme. Extending the project scope to include primaries 4 and 5 pupils with the provision of 2,400 iPads was conducted prior to the October break.</p> <p>Both teachers and students were supported in the use of the devices and from a</p>

		<p>technical perspective whilst ensuring equity of access and raising attainment levels. Scottish Borders infrastructure and resources contributed to remote learning solutions for those within the P4 to S6 settings - unique within the United Kingdom.</p> <p>The Inspire Learning Project is partnered with SBC's IT partner CGI alongside XMA and Apple. Having competed in the Local Government Chronicle (LCG) Awards in 2020 within two categories, future places and public/private partnership, Inspire Learning won both.</p> <p>Borders College mentored 20 senior phase students and provided equipment such as laptops, desks and chairs to ensure commencement of studies. The College partook in the Scottish Government's Youth Guarantee and shall continue to do so in 2021-2022. 500 laptops loans were given to students and 75 WiFi dongles or mobile data packages given to those experiencing financial or access difficulties.</p> <p>As part of the Connecting Scotland Programme, Scottish Borders Council's Homelessness Service supported 10 homeless households and 237 Registered Social Landlord's tenants be become digitally included. Live Borders provided a lending library with 35+ devices loaned and a further 15 progressing.</p> <p>Early Years Centres – Spotlight on Success utilised the Connecting Scotland Programme by supporting 19 families with access to free devices and mifi.</p> <p>Third sector youth organisations assisted young people and their families with the provision of regular data top-ups and loan devices to ensure young people could continue to access online youth work opportunities.</p>
Costs of Living	Fuel Poverty	<p>In March 2020, as a joined up response to COVID 19, Scottish Borders Council put in place Community Assistance Hubs within each of the five localities across the Borders.</p> <p>Working with our partners across the Borders, the Community Assistance Hubs have provided support to their communities through a single point of contact for those who were elderly or otherwise vulnerable. They have assisted with the distribution of PPE to care providers, supported the organisation and delivery of food and medication, provided practical support in relation to pre-paid cards that could be used for the payment of food, fuel (including electricity, gas, petrol and diesel) signposted to services and support groups (including referrals into financial inclusion services) and also coordinated the volunteer response by local community groups.</p> <p>For those who receive support through the Hubs, benefits include:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ problems are resolved effectively through partnership working.</li> <li>▪ good relationships are formed, with some people receiving weekly welfare phone calls.</li> <li>▪ people are able to be connected quickly to the support that they need, when they need it; whether that was by a community group, volunteer support or social care and health.</li> <li>▪ staff and volunteers were able to follow up all calls to find out if any other support was required e.g. if someone had to self-isolate, did they need support to get their food shopping organised, medication, assistance with fuel payments or need care or health support.</li> </ul> <p>The Community Assistance Hubs have also highlighted clear benefits of collaborative working, along with the importance of the role of the Third Sector, Registered Social Landlords, local Resilience Groups, Community Learning &amp; Development, Communities &amp; Partnership staff and other volunteers.</p>

## **Involvement of people with direct lived experience**

The Poverty and Inequality Commission Review of Local Child Poverty Action Reports in November 2019 recommended that consideration should be given as to how to involve people with direct lived experience. People's voices should be heard and should be used to help shape agendas.

Scottish Borders Council have recently carried out a consultation on their draft Anti-Poverty Strategy. People were asked how they were managing financially before and after the Covid-19 Pandemic. The outcome of the consultation will be reported as part of the Anti-Poverty Strategy work, however many of the replies are relevant to families and children, therefore can be taken into account in our Child Poverty Work.

Below are some of the comments made by families in the Scottish Borders:

- *More affordable child care provision to allow people to work more easily*
- *More trustworthy advice about how to access financial help or financial support to improve your house - i.e. windows, heating. Don't know who to trust.*
- *Stop using children's DLA as part of household income - this is to support the kids disability to replace things they break and to make their life easier.*
- *Stop handing money to those who stay at home anyway (on benefits etc) who receive free school meals and help families who are struggling with the increased cost of everything.*
- *Offer Poverty stigma training*
- *Less stigma & more understanding about what poverty actually is & who could be affected.*
- *There is too much red tape and it's made really hard to access by criteria aimed at stopping those that need it getting it.*

## Current position of the Poverty Drivers in the Scottish Borders

Appendix 1(c) shows evidence in relation to the Scottish Borders position on the three drivers of child poverty, high priority risk groups and protected characteristics. Key messages are set out below:

1. Income from employment
  - Scottish Borders average earnings remain lower than the Scottish average by £111 and is the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest out of the 32 Scottish Local Authority areas which presents a challenge.
  - A higher proportion of Scottish Borders young adults aged 16-19 entered employment, training or education when compared to Scotland.
  - 18% of children in the Scottish Borders were living in relative low income families in 2020.
2. Costs of living
  - 47.6% of children in Scottish Borders live in areas classified as “Rural” (Accessible-rural or Remote-rural) which presents a difficulty in terms of access to employment and services due to the cost of transport.
  - The use of food banks increased by 8% in the Scottish Borders in 2020 when compared to the previous year, possibly due to the cost of food combined with lower earnings.
  - When compared to Scotland higher fuel poverty figures are reported in the Scottish Borders impacting on 16,000 households.
  - Children in the Scottish Borders are living with limited resources. Data shows those children living with limited resources before housing costs are higher than the Scottish average as are those living with limited resources after housing costs, with the Scottish Borders rated at 6<sup>th</sup> highest and 4<sup>th</sup> highest respectively across the 32 Local Authority areas.
3. Income from social security and benefits in kind
  - Scottish Borders Council offer a range of different Financial Inclusion services and are involved in several different work streams with a variety of partners. The total gains for the communities in the Borders from this service in 2020/21 totaled £4,237,007. Financial Inclusion enquiries and referrals are received from sources such as Social Work, Education, Community Assistance Hubs, Self-Isolation Support Grant enquiries and external partner organisations.

## The Scottish Borders Child Poverty Index

The Scottish Borders Child Poverty Index (SB CPI) provides additional insight into Child Poverty in the Scottish Borders. The SB CPI works alongside the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). SIMD provides a way of looking at deprivation in an area, covering the whole population and does not specifically reflect child poverty. The SB CPI provides an indication of child poverty levels based on four components. Each area receives a score based on the result of each component with maximum points of 20, where the higher the points the higher the levels of child poverty. These components are:

- Children in Low Income Families (**CiLIF**) – Source is [DWP/HMRC](#). Relative low-income is defined as a family whose equivalised income is below 60 per cent of contemporary median income.
- Free School Meals (**FSM**) – Source is SBC. The proportion of pupils recorded for Free School Meals of all pupils in area for school year.
- Clothing Grant (**CLG**) - Source is SBC. The proportion of pupils recorded for Clothing Grant of all pupils in area for school year.
- Educational Maintenance Allowance (**EMA16+**) – Source is SBC. The proportion of pupils who are aged 16 or older (before 01 March of school year) who receive EMA.

The table below shows the results for the Scottish Borders for 2017 to 2020

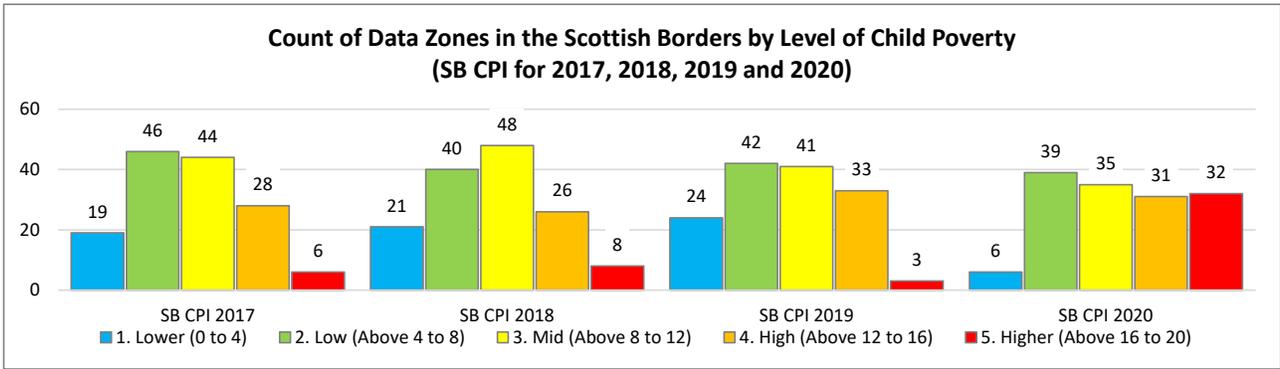
SB CPI Components / Year	For SB CPI 2017	For SB CPI 2018	For SB CPI 2019	For SB CPI 2020
Children in Low Income Families - CiLIF (DWP) ^	19.8%	21.8%	20.6%	<b>22.5%</b>
Free School Meals - FSM (SBC)	10.0%	10.4%	11.6%	<b>15.7%</b>
Clothing Grant - CLG (SBC)	14.6%	15.1%	15.2%	<b>18.1%</b>
Educational Maintenance Allowance 16+ - EMA16+ (SBC) *	8.2%	6.2%	3.8%	<b>16.0%</b>

^ CiLIF: Financial Year End. The calculation of proportion of Children in Low Income Families for the purpose of the Scottish Borders Child Poverty Index differs to 'official statistics' due to the availability of the data from Stat-Xplore. The children in Stat-Xplore are defined as dependent individuals aged under 16; or aged 16 to 19 in full-time non-advanced education or in unwaged government training. The figure for all children is then expressed as proportion of those aged 0 to 15 as published by NRS. It is recognised that this calculation is imperfect, but practical for the purpose of the SB CPI.

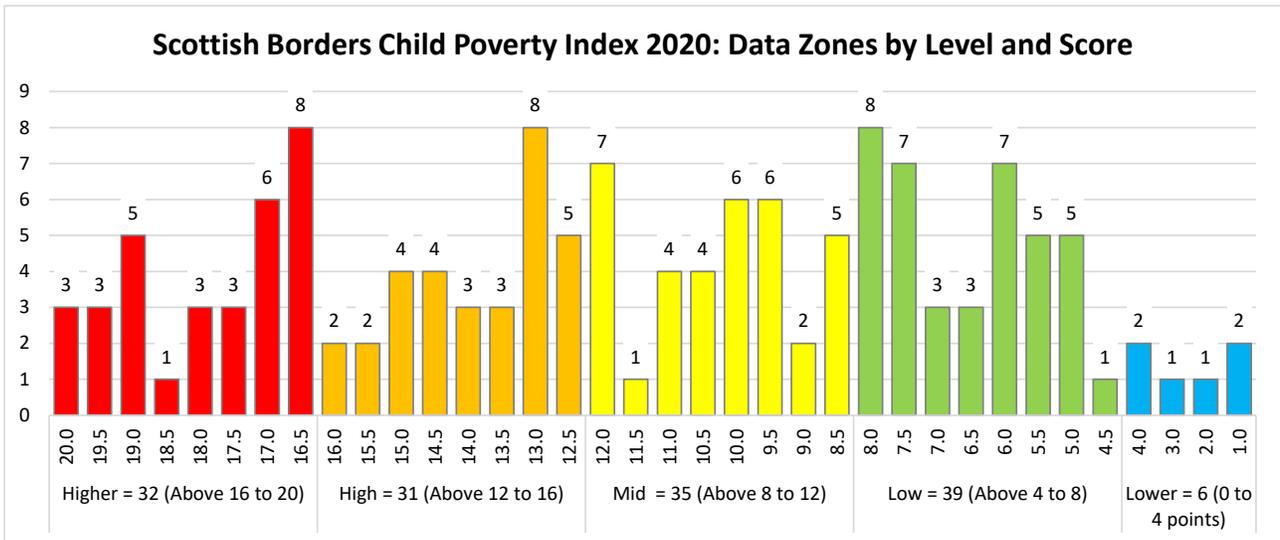
\* EMA16+: Pupils that are aged 16 before the 1st of March of the school year

The results for 2020 show some of the Covid-19 Pandemic impact, with an increase in the proportion of pupils receiving free school meals, clothing grant and educational maintenance allowance. It is important to note that the children in low income families relates to 2019/20, so the full impact of Covid-19 pandemic is not reflected in these figures; this will be reflected in the 2021 SB CPI.

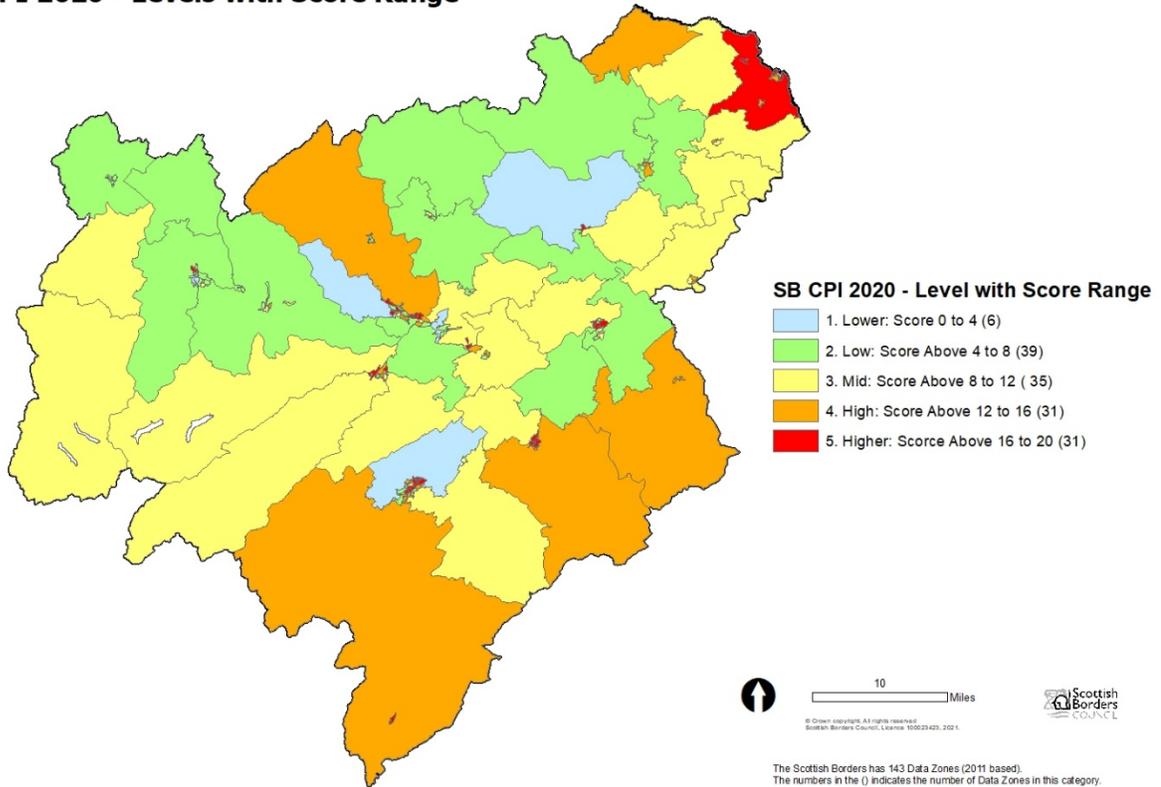
The graph below shows the distribution of data zones by level of child poverty for 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. Between 2017 and 2019 the number of data zones in the 'high' and 'higher' level decreased. However, in the SB CPI 2020 the impact of Covid19 is evident, with 63 of the 143 (44%) data zones in the Scottish Borders having 'high' or 'higher' level of child poverty.



The graph and map below shows the Scottish Borders data zones based on the SB CPI 2020 score, grouped into levels of Child Poverty. Higher level (32 data zones) have a score of above 16 to 20; High level (31 data zones) have a score of above 12 to 16; Mid-level (35 data zones) have a score of above 8 to 12; Low level (39 data zones) have a score of above 4 to 8; and Lower level (6 data zones) have a score of 0 to 4. Every data zone in the Scottish Borders has some element of child poverty.



## Scottish Borders Child Poverty Index 2020 SB CPI 2020 - Levels with Score Range



Greater detail of SB CPI 2020 can be seen in appendix 1(d) Scottish Borders Child Poverty Index 2020.

## Scottish Borders Council Children and Families Social Work Service

Poverty is only one factor in abuse and neglect, but perhaps the most pervasive. Evidence suggests that direct and indirect impacts of poverty can both operate separately and also interact with other factors to increase or reduce the chances of abuse and neglect. It is within this sphere that children and families social work focus their day to day interactions and interventions.

Children and Families social work (C&FSW) fulfils specific statutory duties to children and young people in the Scottish Borders, primarily contained in the following pieces of legislation:

- Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
- Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011
- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

C&FSW provides a range of functions and interventions linked to the impact of poverty including:

- an initial response to referrals, investigating concerns that children may be at significant risk of abuse and neglect;
- a comprehensive service for all looked after children, children on the child protection register and those who are at high risk of becoming so;
- work with children affected by disabilities and their families;
- recruitment of and support to foster carers and prospective adopters and assessment of kinship carers;
- residential provision for young people and a satellite unit for young people in transition to independent living;
- support to young people who were previously looked after and;
- specialist assessment and support to young people who have offended and their families.

The statutory role of C&FSW necessitates focussing on those children, young people and families assessed as most in need, supporting them to navigate complex systems which frequently place them in positions of disadvantage, and supporting children and their families who experience poverty to access services or resources that they may not have been able to. Examples include charity applications; sourcing essentials items such as food, household goods, and clothing; the provision of practical support; the provision of funding for utilities such as gas and electricity.

Advice is provided by staff within the service to support budgeting on a long term basis, and support is provided to ensure income maximisation and access to correct benefit payments. Where a child is placed with kinship carers, the set up costs to purchase bed, bedding, clothes and other equipment is offered to assist the successful commencement of the placement. C&FSW also fund childminding where it is assessed to be in the child/family's best interest.

Self-directed support, where families have increased choice about the support they receive, is currently primarily focused on children with disabilities, however this is a developing area of practice and Scottish Borders C&FSW will continue to engage with Scottish Government to explore options to extend self-directed support to other families.

Scottish Borders C&FSW also commission or purchase a number of services including:

- Aberlour Child Care Trust are commissioned to provide residential respite and day respite play scheme during school holiday periods for children affected by disabilities, and the Sustain Service

- for children and young people at risk of becoming looked after.
- Who Cares? Scotland are commissioned to provide an independent advocacy services for children and young people who are within external placements.
- Children 1st are jointly commissioned by C&FSW and the Children & Young People's Leadership Group to provide an Abuse and Trauma Recovery Service for children and young people who have been the victims of abuse.
- C&FSW also make a contribution to Children Hospice Association Scotland (CHAS) for hospice care services.
- Purchased services include a number of foster placements from independent providers and placements for children and young people who require intensive support in a residential setting.

#### Impact of Covid-19 During lockdown

Additional support has been needed during this time for people who have been on reduced incomes, those who have lost jobs, the increase in food parcels and access to food banks etc. The impact on employment, the impact on mental health which can impact the ability of an individual to access employment but also their ability to access support possibly pushing them further into poverty. Children and families social work services are working to support people experiencing these difficulties.

### **Children's Hearings**

Children's Hearings are usually conducted on a face to face basis with payments made to Parents for mileage payments, public transport fares and on occasion accommodation depending on the circumstances. These expenses are paid without the requirement to demonstrate financial hardship.

As hearings are currently being conducted virtually, this has provided the ability to cover costs of data for families to be able to participate in children's hearings.

### **Police Scotland**

Provision of training to all frontline officers was provided to assist in the identification of families affected by poverty, addiction and financial hardship.

Police Scotland continued to participate, consult and contribute to the Local Child Poverty Reports and Action Plans and SBC's Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan, whilst working collaboratively with Public Protection Unit Staff to identify issues of poverty amongst other child protection concerns leading to referrals to partners for support and inter agency discussions to progress.

### **Student Poverty: Borders College**

Poverty amongst the student body is an ongoing concern further impacted this academic year due to the ongoing Covid-19 health pandemic and the resulting enforced restrictions.

Many students rely on part-time employment to boost their student funding income. Young people in particular are more likely to be on casual or temporary employment contracts in some of the worst hit sectors, e.g. hospitality, therefore may experience limited access to the job retention schemes in place. This relates equally to mature students and those returning to education following family breaks. Others are experiencing household incomes at much lower levels than normal, again due to business restrictions, redundancies or furlough.

In practical terms, as education moved to an online platform to enable the continuation of meaningful learning, digital poverty has been another major challenge. Access to suitable IT equipment and broadband access is critical in ensuring all students have been able to participate and continue learning on a remote basis.

Further pressure came during the early part of this year when already financially stretched students found themselves back in a second lockdown. During this period students were finding meeting the costs for heating due to the winter weather, along with additional food bills as dependents or siblings normally in school were at home, particularly difficult. We also saw a second wave of need for IT/Digital support as the demand on home broadband systems and existing equipment increased due to home schooling and other household members working from home.

Over the last academic year Borders College have mobilised resources to help support our students and as far as possible, help mitigate some of the additional financial pressures due to COVID. This included the provision of around 500 laptop loans and providing students with data dongles or funding to boost mobile data packages to ensure access to appropriate Broadband.

In addition significant levels of Discretionary and Hardship funding (circa £350K) has been awarded to help mitigate the increased living costs and address Student hardship exacerbated by the pandemic and resulting restrictions and lockdown.

Food poverty remains an ongoing issue. We have addressed this in part by the issue of supermarket vouchers to those in need. This has gone some way to replacing our previous, Student Association led food initiative, which provided basic meal kits, and a food bank on Campus.

## Contributions from Strategies, Plans, Budgets and Funding

Several Strategies, Plans and Budgets have contributed to the Local Child Poverty Action Plan for the Scottish Borders. Significant contributions include:

### Budgets

Funding was allocated by Scottish Borders Council in February 2020 to specific budget headings intended to help address the impact of child poverty.

Budget	2020/21
Crisis Grants	£88,188
School clothing grants	£247,800
Free sanitary products in schools and workplaces	£52,000
Educational Maintenance Allowance	£335,814

Budgets for various key services were also used in 2020/21 – Holiday programmes c£15.5k for staff time and resources.

An SBC CLD/TD1 Youth Hub Food Insecurity holiday activity was undertaken in Galashiels which was part of a Scottish Government national pilot. Funding of £10,000 was received from Youthlink Scotland via the Scottish Government for this pilot.

At the emergence of COVID-19, society became cashless with the increased use and preference shifting to online purchasing and banking cards. As a Council we are duty bound by the Social Work Scotland Act 1968 and The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 to ensure the risks of financial crisis faced by vulnerable service users and the general public are minimised. Pre-pandemic this would take the form of money being dispensed from locality Social Work offices but due to restrictions, the introduction of All Pay Cards and online banking were introduced in April 2020 to combat the risks posed and to act as a first response when tackling poverty and hardship, and these practices remain.

By adapting operations, the core fundamentals of practice were transferred to assist in accessing and distributing financial support from Cash For Kids, in supporting the reactive commencement of Community Assistance Hubs and utilised by Community Learning Development staff.

Cash for Kids, STV Winter Fund, Youth Scotland Winter Fund, Borders Children's Charity were all utilised by community organisations to support families in need. Some national third sector organisations were able to utilise their own crisis funding for Borders families, including Action for Children and Children 1<sup>st</sup>.

Between April 2020 and June 2020 Cash For Kids funded £2627.20. Working collaboratively with Children and Families Social Work this ensured 36 families totalling 77 children, aged from birth to 18 years impacted by COVID-19 were provided with financial support using All Pay Cards.

In April and May 2020 All Pay Cards were used by five area Community Assistance Hubs to purchase a total of £1640.00 supermarket vouchers to be dispensed to those in financial crisis.

### **Pupil Equity Funding (PEF)**

In 2020/21, £1,798,854 of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) was allocated to Scottish Borders schools. Allocations are calculated by Scottish Government, based on the number of enrolled learners claiming Free School Meals. For each eligible learner the school is allocated £1,200. Headteachers use the fund to provide additional and targeted support for all children and young people affected by poverty. As well as Free School Meals data, schools look at other indicators of poverty-related disadvantage in decision-making around use of the additional funding. Their choices of intervention are based on evidence of what works in raising attainment in literacy and numeracy, as well as wellbeing.

In 2020/21 schools have needed to adapt their plans for use of PEF in light of the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on plans to support the most disadvantaged learners. This has included monitoring engagement in home learning and engagement with learning hubs, working with community partners and families to provide additional support where needed and putting re-engagement plans in place for vulnerable children and young people during school re-opening phases. Although no formal data was gathered to measure progress (in line with government guidance in response to Covid-19 pressures) we have monitored support for our most vulnerable children and young people to adapt and change support in light of the various challenges they have faced. Headteachers have worked with colleagues in the Central Education Team to ensure that necessary changes to plans were still driven by a focus on raising attainment and improving wellbeing for children and young people affected by poverty. This involved ongoing analyses of needs, identification of appropriate interventions and flexible and responsive planning to measure the impact of each intervention. This work has been further supported by an Attainment Advisor from Education Scotland.

An Equity & Inclusion Lead Officer within Scottish Borders Council has now been appointed to support this ongoing work and help schools to capture impact and progress data now that children and young people have returned to school. This will inform ongoing PEF work, and identify where further targeted interventions are required.

## Housing Needs and Aspirations of Young People

Over 2020/21, work has been undertaken regarding the delivery of the Housing Needs and Aspirations of Young People 5 Year Action Plan – April 2019. Young People are being enabled to make more successful and sustainable transitions into their own housing and there has been a commitment from a range of partners to facilitate. There is currently work taking place to ensure that SBC and Partners continue to work closely with each other to ensure that this is delivered. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the progress of some pieces of work.

## Financial Inclusion

A Financial Inclusion group was formed and is chaired by NHS Borders. This group has partners from Early Years, Health, Third sector, Social Security Scotland (SSS) and Community and Learning Development (CLD).

**Scottish Borders Council** offer a range of different Financial Inclusion services and are involved in several different work streams with a variety of partners. The total gains for the communities in the Borders from this service in 2020/21 totaled **£4,237,007**.

Financial Inclusion enquiries and referrals are received from sources such as Social Work, Education, Community Assistance Hubs, Self-Isolation Support Grant enquiries and external partner organisations.

Specific Services	
SBC	Partner Organisations
Financial Inclusion Officers	CAB
Macmillan Welfare Benefits	NHS Borders
Early Years	Registered Social Landlords
Homelessness	Borders College
Scottish Welfare Fund	Home Energy Scotland
Discretionary Housing Payments	DWP
Community Assistance Hubs	Social Security Scotland
Free school meals and Education Maintenance Allowance	Food banks/FareShare/Community Larders & Fridges
Covid-19 Response – Proposals to further support individuals facing financial hardship	Charities and Voluntary Organisations

There are generally good links between all of the organisations undertaking Financial Inclusion work and in most cases referral processes are in place if required.

There are concerns about solutions to food poverty and fuel poverty and there is an increasing emphasis on doing more than providing the 'sticking plasters' of Crisis Grants, energy top ups or food parcels. Organisations are encouraging more sustainable long-term solutions e.g., improving energy efficiency, applying for benefits/grants, or signposting to employability services which will increase income and reduce the possibility of a crisis occurring in the future.

Digital inclusion is another factor and a recent study estimated that one in seven adults in Scotland was experiencing 'data poverty' and those on low incomes try to juggle buying food, fuel and having access to the internet.

There is support for some fuel emergencies but there are concerns about the impact when Covid related financial support ends.

A mapping exercise is currently underway to set out all the work streams that the Council is involved in, along with partners and other organisations. This will include specific funding streams, mapping the services that are available, increase awareness of support offered and give advice on signposting.

### Best Start Grants

The Scottish Borders has one of the highest application success rates in the country for Best Start Grants. The excellent network we have in the Borders, facilitated by the advice/information given to all of the midwives, early years centres and other groups has contributed to this success.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/best-start-grant-and-best-start-foods-high-level-statistics-to-28-february-2021/>

## **Employability and Skills**

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) has worked with Scottish Borders Council, Borders College, the Borders Learning and Skills Partnership and SOSE and have shared regional COVID-19 labour market insights. There are currently discussions taking place between SDS and partners across the Scottish Borders and the South of Scotland in order for targeted responses to impacts of Covid-19 to be supported.

SDS has provided a focus on where there are employment opportunities and discussions are underway to explore a package of labour market measures such as Youth Guarantee and digital literacy pathfinder to support transitions into training, education and employment.

The full **Regional Skills Assessment** for the Scottish Borders, which was published in March 2021, can be seen via the following link:

<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/47100/rsa-infographic-scottish-borders.pdf>

A piece of work was undertaken regarding the Employability Challenge in the Scottish Borders and to set out Scottish Borders Council's approach to employability and training in response to existing and new employability measures introduced by the Scottish and UK Governments.

The full reports can be seen at the following link:

<https://scottishborders.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s49403/Item%2010%20-%20Executive%20report%20on%20Employability.%200090221.pdf>

## **EU Exit**

Alongside COVID, the need to adjust to life outside the EU presents a concurrent challenge. Free movement of citizens between the UK and EU has ended and the UK is no longer part of the EU customs union and single market. Instead, it has a Co-operation and Trade Agreement that allows zero tariffs and zero quotas trading of goods on the basis of an agreed set of rules. While some initial trading and bureaucratic issues have eased, and can be expected to ease further as businesses become more familiar with new processes, it is unlikely that they will disappear completely. Among a range of requirements, new Customs & VAT requirements, health and rules of origin checks are a function of the Trade Agreement between the UK and EU. Unless those elements are superseded by

new arrangements, they are likely to be permanent liabilities and a potential drag on businesses and business recovery. This has caused experts to predict that the UK economy will be much smaller going forward. It remains difficult to predict the precise impact of this on the Scottish Borders, but it has potential implications for everyone, most of all for the socially and economically vulnerable. Moreover, as already noted, businesses are not dealing only with the consequences of EU Exit, but also with the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and successive lockdowns, and the significant damage to the national and local economies these have already wrought.

Demographic groups that were already disadvantaged before the pandemic are more likely to experience negative effects in many different areas of their life, including in educational opportunities, employment prospects, financial security, social outcomes and health and wellbeing. Among the most impacted groups are children and young people; older people who are isolated; people with pre-existing mental health problems; people with long-term disabling physical health conditions; unemployed people and those in insecure employment; Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities; single parents and women.

The number of children in the most deprived deciles was limited. However, there was significant evidence to suggest that Scottish Borders have a higher proportion than comparable rural areas of children and young people who fall into the category of being at risk of falling in poverty. This matters because COVID-19 and EU Exit have made it much more likely that our economy going forward will be much smaller than it was. This has implications with respect to the number of jobs, and how well paid they are. Fewer poorer paid jobs equals more children deprived or at risk of deprivation.

It also likely where children and families are in poverty, their situation is more complex on average than it may have been previously. This reflects the range of factors at play – parents/carers/young people being out of work or, in-work poverty, rising food prices, potential pressure on energy prices, issues over transport access and wider deprivation in relation to connectivity, including digitally.

There is some expectation of a consumer driven economic bounce as we emerge from COVID. Whether that will be sustained and the ability of those families are struggling to catch the wave must be in doubt, however.

The UK Government's Levelling Up funds are, as the title suggests, intended to drive better outcomes for communities that have historically done less well. The Scottish Borders is one of the 13 priority Category 1 areas identified in Scotland under the Community Renewal and it is also priority under the Levelling Up Fund, but the funding arrangements are still 'challenge funds', and it remains an open question as to whether this is the best method of targeting resources to where they are most needed even within regions identified as broadly in need.

## **Fairer Scotland Duty**

The Fairer Scotland Duty (the Duty) places a legal responsibility on particular public bodies in Scotland to actively consider how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions. To support public bodies in implementing the Duty, the Scottish Government produced interim guidance in March 2018 and is now looking to finalise the guidance through a consultation, which is going on at the present moment. Importantly from a Borders' perspective, South of Scotland Enterprise has been added to the list of public bodies covered by the duty (the Scottish National Investment Bank being the other).

The key issue is how influential the FSD is in practical impact on the services and support to those suffering inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage. The implementation of the Duty remains a work in progress but,

In theory, the FSD should make a difference for communities when socio economic factors have been a consideration, however Scottish Borders Council will need to develop and nurture the practical aspects, as currently only the basics are in place. Poverty and its associated factors are well known in the Borders (and Scotland as a whole), it's the how and what needs to be done to truly meet the merits of the duty that remains a challenge for SBC and Scotland's other 31 councils.

There has been an enormous change since the Council's Corporate Plan was agreed in May 2018. Evidence suggests that nationally and locally our health, economy, societal and cultural outcomes have been deeply negatively impacted and continue to worsen on account of COVID, the Climate and Nature Emergencies, EU Exit. The Refresh seeks to promote a strengthening of the Council's values and vision, and in a unifying mission which builds on the commitments under the four themes of the Corporate Plan. These values, vision and mission require to be set against a refreshed set of strategic priorities. These also require to be translated into action and, ultimately, results. These steps are being pursued through development of Service Plans and a Review of Performance Management.

A specific goal of the Refresh is to construct:

- A set of values, which includes: a People-focus and Inclusion;
- A vision of 'happier and healthier people and places'; and
- A mission to 'optimise wellbeing' including 'Fairness and equality based on the notions of personal freedom, equality of treatment, respect for all human beings and a belief that one's views matter'.

The goal is to ensure that equality and inclusion are fundamental ways of 'doing' which are built into the fabric of all and everything that Scottish Borders Council does. Thus, the Refresh will not relate to a group or groups with specific protected characteristics. The key issue is how influential the FSD is in practical impact on the services and support to those suffering inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage. The implementation of the Duty remains a work in progress but it is intended to strengthen the culture of the organisation in ensuring that all of our activities are informed by values and vision built on fairness and equality with a mission, which includes actively promoting equality and inclusion outcomes.

## **Challenge Poverty Week – October 2020**

Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders and other partners supported Challenge Poverty Week in October 2020 by highlighting the wide range of information, advice and support that is available to support people experiencing financial hardship. In previous years, various workshops and events were held, however due to Covid-19 restrictions, the campaign was publicised through social media channels. The social media plan is shown in Appendix 1(e).

## 2021-2022 Report and Action Plan

The Child Poverty Planning Group recently met to discuss high level actions for the 2021/22 Action Plan and the group is in the process of developing these. The Report and Action Plan will be presented to the Community Planning Strategic Board in June 2021 for approval.

The impact of Covid-19 and the recovery from the pandemic will continue to feature as a key priority of the 2021/22 Action Plan and many of the actions reflect this.

The Child Poverty Planning Group has identified the following headings for inclusion in the 2021/22 Action Plan:

- Impact of Covid-19 pandemic including local issues
- Addressing Food insecurity
- Financial Inclusion including mapping current services and promoting awareness of these
- Employability opportunities including the Parental Employment Project, the Intensive Family Support Service and modern apprenticeships in Early Years
- Costs of the school day
- Housing services working with tenants to prevent and alleviate homelessness, avoid rent arrears and manage fuel debt
- Holiday programmes with specific ring-fenced funding from Scottish Government
- The continuation of the successful Connecting Scotland Programme to get people online

## Conclusion

In accordance with The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, the Scottish Borders Local Child Poverty Annual Report for 2020/21 describes the activities undertaken and planned locally to contribute towards Child Poverty targets set out in the Act. These are very important and ambitious targets which are designed to reduce child poverty by 2030. Without intervention and mitigation at both a national and local level, these will be difficult to achieve. Current levels suggest that 1 in 4 Scottish children are affected by child poverty and Local Child Poverty Action Plans must address this.

It is clear from the Annual Progress Report for 2021/21 that Child Poverty in the Scottish Borders is an important issue which Partners take seriously. This is illustrated in the tremendous amount of work undertaken in 2020/21 in challenging circumstances. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced services to think differently so that they could continue to carry out their actions in response to child poverty, and many children and families have benefitted as a result, and will continue to do so in 2021/22.

The Scottish Borders Child Poverty Index, the continuation of Scottish Government PEF Funding, Financial Inclusion work, food security work and other important actions will all assist the Local Authority, Health Board and partners to continue to develop plans to address child poverty in the Scottish Borders, so that they can make a difference to children and families experiencing hardship.

We will continue to raise the profile of our collective need to reduce child poverty as we develop the Action Plan for 2021/22, particularly recognising the impact of Covid-19 and the Community Planning Partnership's Key Priorities and Actions.