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## **SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY**

**Report by Service Director, Resilient Communities**

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**SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**

**23 September 2021**

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### **1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 **Following a 6-month consultation period, this report presents the finalised Anti-Poverty Strategy for proposed adoption. This report summarises the consultation process and outcomes, next steps in delivering on the Strategy Action Plan, including the establishment of an Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group, and seeks adoption of the Strategy.**
- 1.2 The Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy was previously presented to Council on 25 February 2021 following a motion by Councillor Tatler to Council in September 2020, and a Working Group was set up to develop an approach to public consultation and create a final Strategy and Action Plan for approval. This Working Group has now completed its task and it is proposed that it is replaced by an Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group (Terms of Reference detailed at Appendix 1) which will monitor the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan.
- 1.3 This Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy (Appendix 2) sets out the steps that Scottish Borders Council and Partners plan to take in tackling poverty in the Scottish Borders in relation to:
- 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 and the lived experience of those in hardship will be taken into account in how the ongoing delivery of the Action Plan (Appendix 3) evolves.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 **I recommend that the Council:**
- (a) Notes the feedback provided from the consultations on the Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan.**
  - (b) Approves the establishment of an Anti-Poverty Members' Reference Group and Terms of Reference as detailed at Appendix 1 and appoint the members of the group.**
  - (c) Approves the finalised Strategy (Appendix 2) and Action Plan (Appendix 3) for adoption.**
  - (d) Agrees to receive an annual Progress Report of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan.**

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 In February 2021, Council approved the draft Scottish Borders Anti-Poverty Strategy, and agreed that the Anti-Poverty Working Group develop an approach to public consultation and create a final Strategy and Action Plan for approval and adoption.
- 3.2 It was recognised that the draft Strategy had been developed from a mainly internal perspective and that full consultation with partners, communities and other organisations would be required in order to enable the draft Strategy and Action Plan to be finalised.
- 3.3 The approach to this consultation was co-produced with third sector organisations and other partners to ensure that a combination of different types of engagement were undertaken. This included discussions with organisations that were directly involved in supporting those in poverty, and to hear from them what types of consultation would be best undertaken and potential questions to be asked in order to identify further actions that could be taken to support our communities.
- 3.4 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 specifically sought to engage with, and what actions could be taken to alleviate the impact of poverty and support those individuals better.

### **4 CONSULTATION FEEDBACK**

- 4.1 It was vital to involve people with direct lived experience in the development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan. Their ongoing input will continue to be 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.
- 4.2 Two public surveys were undertaken from March to May 2021, one was designed specifically in relation to the Draft Strategy (34 responses), and the other to inform us regarding lived experience (62 responses). The lived experience consultation compared their pre-covid situation and their current situation in order to gain additional information on poverty challenges that may have been experienced due to the pandemic.
- 4.3 The key results of the Strategy consultation are detailed below:
  - Responses were informative but not statistically significant

- It was felt that the vision of the Strategy could be more ambitious
- More emphasis was required on Education, Infrastructure, Chronic Health, Climate Change, Housing and Transport
- The challenges section needed to be strengthened in relation to:
  - Aspiration
  - Hidden rural poverty
  - Global climate change
  - Housing
- Additional opportunities were also identified:
  - Leverage in additional funding coming through the voluntary sector
  - Further engagement with third sector, community groups and individuals
  - Living Wage should be promoted more widely
  - More recognition that Borderlands/City Deal/SoSE will bring significant investment to the Scottish Borders

- 4.4 The key results of the Inform consultation which focussed on direct lived experience are detailed below:
- Responders felt that their health had deteriorated during the pandemic
  - They were managing less well financially – food, household essentials, fuel & energy debts
  - Economic status appears to have worsened during the pandemic
  - Travel is an increasing issue
  - Awareness of what support is available is low in some areas
  - Opportunities for work and training/skill development were poor
  - Wages across the Borders are low
  - Digital access still an issue
- 4.5 Following the public consultations, further feedback was also sought from Community Planning Partners and other focus groups. This feedback provided valuable insight into direct lived experience and the importance of joint working. The outcomes of this additional feedback are reflected in the Action Plan.
- 4.6 A Financial Inclusion Workshop is being planned, which will bring together a range of partners who are providing financial inclusion support to our communities. The aim of the workshop will be to connect and promote partnership working, identify further opportunities to work more closely together and also identify any gaps in support provision. The Anti-Poverty Action

Plan will be updated with any appropriate actions arising from the workshop.

## **5 THE STRATEGY**

- 5.1 The Strategy sets out a clear vision and works with 6 themes and 11 outcomes and highlights areas of activity that the Council and Partners aim to deliver to help reduce poverty in the Scottish Borders. The final version of the Strategy is attached at Appendix 2.
- 5.2 Both national and local context show that there is poverty in the Scottish Borders before the Covid-19 pandemic and is likely to get worse as a result. This is evidenced in Annex A – Scottish Borders Picture of Poverty.
- 5.3 The Strategy recognises that there are already many plans and strategies in existence which contribute to reducing poverty in the Scottish Borders and these are outlined in the Strategy specifically to illustrate various Partners involved.

## **6 PROPOSED ANTI-POVERTY MEMBERS REFERENCE GROUP – ROLE AND REMIT**

- 6.1 Having been set up by Council to develop an approach to public consultation and create a final Strategy and Action Plan for approval, the current Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group has now completed its task. If Council approves this Strategy and Action Plan, then it is proposed that this Working Group is replaced by an Anti-Poverty Strategy Members Reference Group. The objectives of this Group will be to monitor the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan to ensure that it benefits those most in need.
- 6.2 It is proposed that the Reference Group will comprise 7 Elected Members of Council, appointed on a non-political basis. The Members appointed to this Group should have the time and energy to dedicate to monitoring the implementation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan, giving guidance to officers, and reporting to Council as necessary. Although this is a Council Strategy, it is anticipated that the Reference Group will receive input from the Council's partners and other organisations and individuals, including those with lived experience of poverty, to help identify any gaps or areas for further focus. Further details of this Reference Group are contained in Appendix 1 to the report.

## **7 DELIVERY OF THE STRATEGY – ACTION PLAN**

- 7.1 The Anti-Poverty Action Plan has been developed to take into account and recognise the comments received as part of the consultation process. The comments have been aligned to the themes and outcomes that are set out in the Strategy and this forms the structure of the Action Plan. This is attached at Appendix 3 and will continue to be developed.
- 7.2 Lived experience has also been gathered from various focus groups and is taken into account in the Action Plan.
- 7.3 Within the Action Plan, we recognise that existing plans, strategies and reports significantly contribute to meeting the outcomes set. These have therefore been aligned to each of the outcomes within the Action Plan. As well as this, new high level actions have been created where gaps were identified and will continue to be developed as part of the work of the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group. Key to this work will be measuring the impact of the actions taken for each outcome. Work will continue to develop an appropriate measurement framework.

## **8 NEXT STEPS**

- 8.1 Once approved, the Strategy will be adopted and launched during Challenge Poverty Week (4th to 10th October 2021), on the Council's website, social media and through the various networks within the Scottish Borders who have been involved in the development of the Strategy. Additional community engagement will be considered to further raise awareness and identify successes and opportunities to further aims of the Strategy.
- 8.2 It is proposed that the original Working Group which worked on and produced the Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan now be replaced with an Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group to monitor the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan. It is intended that the Group will meet quarterly – or more frequently if necessary - to ensure the Strategy and Action Plan remain appropriate to address identified current or emerging issues as well as being both realistic and achievable, evaluating their impact and success on a regular basis.
- 8.3 The actions within the Strategy will be implemented and Officers will work with colleagues across the Borders to deliver on the commitments contained in the Action Plan. An annual Progress Report will be presented to Council.

## 9 IMPLICATIONS

### 9.1 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.

### 9.2 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 provides a number of mitigations to these risks, and effective evaluation and monitoring processes will be key to evidencing the impact of the Action Plan.

### 9.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

A full integrated impact assessment (IIA) has been completed and will be published on the Council's website.

### 9.4 Sustainable Development Goals

In considering each of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the following may be considered to make a difference:

1. End poverty in all its forms – Local action is reported in the Anti-Poverty Action Plan which contributes to this goal, including income maximisation activity which will benefit those who need it most.
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture – Local action is reported in the Anti-Poverty Action Plan which contributes to this goal. A Community Food Growing Strategy is in place which aims to support and facilitate community food growing driven by the needs of communities.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages – health and wellbeing (including good mental health) is recognised as an important factor in the Anti-Poverty Strategy. Work to keep people well who experience poverty continues. Improving transport connectivity will also contribute to healthy lives and this is included in the Action Plan.
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all – work continues with Education Services to identify and tackle barriers to school attendance brought about through poverty. Our Community Learning and Development Plans provide technical and vocational training programmes, and our Partners also provide various opportunities through local economic development strategies. These actions all help to support vulnerable

and marginalized individuals and communities to ensure access to education and training to meet their needs

5. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all – Partners contribute by identifying gaps in access to affordable energy, particularly to vulnerable groups and ensuring their tenants have access to energy efficient homes.
6. Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all – many of the actions contained in the Anti-Poverty Action plan are around the generation of growth and employment through local economic development opportunities.
7. Reduce inequalities within and among countries – the Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan aims to identify and tackle poverty and exclusion and boost employment opportunities and income in the poorest communities.
8. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe resilient and sustainable - work to make access to affordable housing attainable is contained within the Anti-Poverty Action Plan. Improving transport connectivity is also an aim of the Action Plan.

#### 9.5 **Climate Change**

There is no impact on climate change as a result of this report.

#### 9.6 **Rural Proofing**

There are no rural proofing implications contained in this report.

#### 9.7 **Data Protection Impact Statement**

There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

#### 9.8 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

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

## **10 CONSULTATION**

- 10.1 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 received have been incorporated into the final report.

10.2 The Corporate Equalities and Diversity Officer has been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

**Approved by**  
**Jenni Craig Service Director Resilient Communities**

**Signature .....**

**Author(s)**

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**Background Papers:** N/A

**Previous Minute Reference:** Scottish Borders Council 25th February 2021

**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.

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