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## **ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY PROGRESS REPORT**

**Report by Director, Resilient Communities**

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### **SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**

**29 June 2023**

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#### **1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report presents progress made in delivering the Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan, which was adopted by Council on 23 September 2021.**
- 1.2 This report also gives an update of the work of the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group, the Financial Inclusion Group and the quarterly Food Conversations. An update report in relation to additional poverty support provided by the £1.2M Cost of Living Fund is also being brought to this Council meeting.

#### **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **2.1 I recommend that Council:**

- a) Agrees the Anti-Poverty Strategy 2021 Progress Report.**
- b) Notes the work of the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group, the Financial Inclusion Practitioners Group and the Food Conversations Group.**
- c) Agrees that the Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan (created in 2021) is refreshed.**

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 At the meeting of Scottish Borders Council on 23 September 2021, the Scottish Borders Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan was agreed. It was also agreed to receive a Progress Report for the Action Plan. The Strategy and Action Plan were launched during Challenge Poverty Week (4-10 October 2021).
- 3.2 The Strategy set out a clear vision, with 6 themes and 11 outcomes. It also highlighted areas of activity that the Council and Partners were looking to deliver to help reduce poverty in the Scottish Borders, and the creation of the Strategy and Action Plan was supported and evidenced by the Scottish Borders Picture of Poverty.
- 3.3 It was also agreed on 23 September 2021 to establish a Members Reference Group, which comprises of 7 Elected Members of Council appointed on a non-political basis. The role of this group is to give guidance to officers, to receive input from the Council's partners and other organisations and individuals, including those with lived experience of poverty, and to help identify gaps or areas for further focus.
- 3.4 The Anti-Poverty Action Plan was developed to take into account the comments received as part of the public consultation process. It was agreed that the Action Plan would be flexible and could be adapted to remain appropriate to address identified current or emerging issues. Ongoing evaluation would be considered by the Members Reference Group.
- 3.5 In June 2022, the Community Planning Strategic Board approved four themes for the 2022/23 CPP Work Plan (interim Community Plan):
  1. Theme 1 – enough money to live on
  2. Theme 2 – access to work, learning and training
  3. Theme 3 – enjoying good health and wellbeing
  4. Theme 4 – a good place to grow up, live and enjoy a full life

Actions within the Anti-Poverty Action Plan make a significant contribution to the outcomes contained within each theme.

### **4 ANTI-POVERTY ACTION PLAN 11 OUTCOMES**

- 4.1 The actions and progress made against the 11 outcomes of the Anti-Poverty Action Plan are detailed in the Anti-Poverty Strategy Progress Report detailed at Appendix 1. Key highlights include:

#### **4.2 Pockets - Maximising Income**

Monetary gains for benefits (inclusive of Macmillan support and Financial help in Early Years) for 2021/22 amounted to £3,390m and for 2022/23 the figure was £3,945m. The Council's Financial Inclusion Team assists residents of the Scottish Borders to gain access to these benefits via advice, and support.

#### **4.3 Prospects – Education and Training**

Fifteen thousand iPads have been distributed to pupils and school staff since 2019, and the Centre of Excellence for Digital Learning opened in Tweedbank in October 2022. This provides a digital training space where equal access to technology is available to children, young people, families, businesses and organisations.

#### **4.4 Prospects – Employment**

The Scottish Borders Local Employment Partnership (LEP) have supported individuals into paid employment through initiatives such as No One Left Behind, the Employment Support Service, the Parental Employability Service and the Job Creation Scheme.

#### **4.5 Prospects – Health and Wellbeing**

Over 1400 young people directly benefitted from the Warm and Well: Youth Work Collaborative which was funded from the £1.2m cost of living support package, and was designed to deliver additional youth work and activities to keep young people warm and well over winter 2022/23.

#### **4.6 Places – Housing**

£31k was awarded from the Homelessness Intervention Fund, designed to prevent homelessness for households in rent arrears and at risk of homelessness

#### **4.7 Places – Transport Connectivity**

Legislation was approved by Scottish Parliament in autumn 2021 to extend the young person's free bus scheme to those aged under 22. As at May 2023, approx 24% of operator transactions on Border Buses are from U22s.

#### **4.8 Places – Digital Connectivity**

SBC and SOSE provided £150k of funding to support digital connectivity, and 539 devices were distributed to those facing barriers to digital inclusion.

#### **4.9 People – Community**

Officers are currently assisting with the delivery of Place Making in 56 of 69 community council areas across the Scottish Borders, and actively engaging with the remaining 13.

#### **4.10 People – Poverty Awareness and Responsibility**

Skills Development Scotland create learning opportunities that help people get into and progress in rewarding work so that they develop skills and competencies which help them to maintain employment.

#### **4.11 Partnerships –Working Collaboratively**

Partners have worked together to deliver the Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan. Specific partnership groups include:

- Cost of Living Strategic Group
- Cost of Living Operational Group
- Financial Inclusion Practitioners Group
- Food Conversations Group

#### **4.12 Pathways – Signposting and Support**

Scottish Borders Council launched dedicated Cost of Living webpages in September 2022 to provide information on a wide variety of support such as financial assistance, help with energy costs and access to food and warm spaces.

4.13 Subject to the agreement of Council, the Anti-Poverty Progress Report will be published on the Council's website and shared with all partners.

### **5 ANTI-POVERTY MEMBERS REFERENCE GROUP**

- 5.1 The main objective of the Members Reference Group is to monitor the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan to ensure that it brings benefit to those most in need.
- 5.2 The group was formally established in September 2021 and initially met on a quarterly basis. This has increased to monthly since September 2022 in response to the emerging cost of living crisis.
- 5.3 The group have provided guidance and insight, particularly in relation to energy costs and household support, and how to reach those most in need. They have heard from other organisations and partners in order to develop an understanding of the impact of poverty, and how the actions within the Anti-Poverty Action Plan are assisting those in need.
- 5.4 The group have also overseen and provided guidance in relation to the Cost of Living Fund spend, and have tasked officers with specific actions to assist with the identification of gaps in support being provided. They have also received data and information from the Poverty Data Group, an officer group that was created to provide additional information to the ongoing development of the Picture of Poverty, and to inform the actions within the Action Plan.
- 5.5 The Members Reference Group have highlighted resourcing gaps in advice and support, specifically around energy and fuel, and have had case studies presented to them to provide assurance of where best that Cost of Living financial support should be invested.
- 5.6 The Group have also raised the profile of Credit Unions. As a result, a working group is considering how we can set up a Credit Union in the Scottish Borders. A Credit Union is a financial co-operative which provides savings, loans and a range of services to its members. It is owned and controlled by the members. It is hoped that a Credit Union would provide an

effective option for residents of the Scottish Borders to help them to manage their money.

## **6 FINANCIAL INCLUSION PRACTITIONERS GROUP**

- 6.1 The Financial Inclusion Group was set up to bring officers across the Borders together to identify what support was currently in place, and how information could be more easily shared. Over 65 officers were involved in this multi-agency group which covers a huge range of partnership working.
- 6.2 This creation of this group and the work undertaken has allowed a more strategic, targeted approach to be developed specifically in response to the cost of living crisis. The sharing of information has enabled the development of the Cost of Living Support information pages on the SBC website, and a strong partnership approach to Challenge Poverty Week in October 2022.
- 6.3 The Financial Inclusion Group also led to the establishment of the Cost of Living Strategic Group, which has continued the multi-agency approach to awarding funding on a partnership basis. This approach has been very well received, and being discussed at a national level as an exemplary model of partnership working.

## **7 FOOD CONVERSATIONS GROUP**

- 7.1 The Food Conversations Group was set up during the Covid-19 pandemic to enable foodbanks, FareShare providers and other organisations to come together to share information and raise emerging and current issues. Community Hubs were then tasked to support and assist in resolving these issues at a local level, and worked with volunteers on the ground to ensure that food was provided to those in need.
- 7.2 After the immediate response to the pandemic, the group agreed that they wanted to continue to meet and to build on the network that had been created, and where possible, to shift from providing emergency food parcels to providing a more holistic approach which includes information on how and where to obtain financial support, and more sustainable solutions for an individual's food security.
- 7.3 An example of this is the Low and Slow Project which provides slow cookers, produce and recipes etc., as well as financial inclusion information. There are currently 6 projects taking place across the Borders:
  - Galashiels
  - Eyemouth
  - Duns Primary School
  - Burnfoot Community Hub
  - Newcastleton
  - Borders College (in development)
- 7.4 In parallel to this work, community cook clubs and larders are being considered within Selkirk, Walkerburn, Jedburgh and Galashiels.

## **8 NEXT STEPS**

- 8.1 The Anti-Poverty Strategy was approved in September 2021. Since it was established there has been a wide range of activity undertaken by Partners to deliver the Action Plan and help residents of the Scottish Borders. The cost of living crisis emerged around spring of 2022 and remains in focus now. It is important to continue to support those in need, therefore the Strategy and Action Plan require to be refreshed to ensure they are still fit for purpose and adaptable to respond to current and emerging issues.
- 8.2 The Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group, the Financial Inclusion Practitioners Group and the Food Conversation Group have all proved to be invaluable in terms of guidance, support, information sharing and partnership working. These groups will continue to meet regularly to respond to current and emerging issues.

## **9 IMPLICATIONS**

### **9.1 Financial**

There are no direct budgets identified to deliver the Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan. Budgets within partner organisations are used accordingly to deliver their specific plans, and these benefit residents of the Scottish Borders. The Child Poverty national delivery plan distributes funding streams locally and these help to alleviate poverty.

The Council released an underspend from reserves to provide £1.2m support to communities during 2022/23 for the cost of living crisis. Balances have been carried forward into 2023/24. There is also an outstanding balance of £15,715 from the Financial Hardship Fund. Other earmarked balances from 2022/23 will increase budgets available for 2023/24 for the Scottish Welfare Fund, Inclusion Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments. Together with Scottish Government cost of living payments and other grant offers eg. Child poverty funding, these budgets will continue to support a range of measures to provide additional resources where required to address the continuing cost of living issues.

Some funding provided to local authorities by Scottish Government during the pandemic is unlikely to continue, therefore decisions on budget priorities will need to be taken locally.

### **9.2 Risk and Mitigations**

- a) Risks associated with this report relate to the level of poverty across the Scottish Borders and the difficulties caused by the cost of living crisis.
- b) Appendix 1 outlines the progress made to alleviate poverty in the Scottish Borders and the response being made by the Local Authority to address issues going forward.

### **9.3 Integrated Impact Assessment**

An integrated impact assessment has been carried out for this report and is shown in Appendices 2 and 3. There are no specific implications.

## 9.4 Sustainable Development Goals

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

- a) **No Poverty:** This report details 6 strategic themes, identified within the Anti-Poverty Action Plan, which contribute to ending poverty in all its forms.
- b) **Zero Hunger:** Strategic and local action contributing to the reduction of hunger, improvement of food insecurity and nutrition, and the promotion of sustainable agriculture is reported and evidenced throughout the Anti-Poverty Progress Report. Provision of knowledge, advice and support is evidenced throughout the 6 reported themes, driven by the needs of the community.
- c) **Good Health and Wellbeing:** The Anti-Poverty Progress Report details 6 strategic themes, each ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all, at all ages. Specifically, theme 2 evidences the work carried out at a local level to ensure that communities are healthy, happy and well.
- d) **Quality Education:** Strategic theme 2 from the Anti-Poverty Action Plan details 'Education and Training', the aims to improve attainment and achievement for all, to enable them to reach their full potential. This report details employment figures in relation to benefit uptake in comparison to the UK and Scotland. The Community Learning and Development team continue to work to support those experiencing difficulties of school age.
- e) **Affordable and Clean Energy:** Detailed in theme 1, partnerships with organisations such as Home Energy Scotland work to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all throughout the Scottish Borders.
- f) **Decent Work and Economic Growth:** Many of the 6 strategic themes inform and contribute to the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
- g) **Reduced Inequalities:** Through the development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan, Scottish Borders Council have employed significant action to identify poverty inequalities and exclusion throughout the Borders communities which are evidenced throughout this report.
- h) **Sustainable Cities and Communities:** Detailed in theme 3 'Places', this report evidences the steps taken to make our communities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. This refers to housing as well as both transport and digital connectivity.

## 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 this report.

## 9.8 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.

## 10 CONSULTATION

10.1 The Acting Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into this report.

### Approved by

**Jenni Craig**  
**Director Resilient Communities**

### Author(s)

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**Background Papers:** n/a

**Previous Minute Reference:** Scottish Borders Council 23.09.21

**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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