



SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY 2021

Progress Report

June 2023

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ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY 2021

Progress Report



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Scottish Borders Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy Progress Report.

The Anti-Poverty Strategy was launched during Challenge Poverty Week in October 2021, and since then we have been working with partners to deliver the action plan included in the strategy.

Our Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group has met regularly to monitor the implementation of the strategy and action plan and to ensure that it remains appropriate to address identified current or emerging issues, such as the cost of living crisis.

We remain focused on our clear vision:

- We want a Scottish Borders where no-one lives in poverty and where everyone is able to achieve their full potential.
- We want the Scottish Borders to be a place where everyone can play their part in understanding that tackling poverty is everyone's responsibility.
- We believe that if we act locally, and in partnership, we can make a real difference.
- We want this Scottish Borders Anti-Poverty Strategy to be pro-active, evidenced by real experience and directed by need.
- Working with the people of the Scottish Borders, we aim to find solutions to poverty challenges which support them in a way that works best for them.

The Anti-Poverty Strategy is structured around the 'pockets, prospects, places' measurement framework adopted by the Scottish Government Child Poverty Strategy with its own additions of 'people', 'partnerships', and 'pathways', and 11 outcomes, with progress against each of these set out in this report. Activities undertaken to tackle poverty in the Scottish Borders are highlighted, and as a result, we are pleased to show that our strategy is making a difference as we work towards reducing the impacts of poverty in the Scottish Borders.

Councillor Robin Tatler

Chair of the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group

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STRATEGY OUTCOMES



Maximising Income

Maximise financial resources of households and reduce out-going costs. Households can access services and be socially, digitally, and financially included.



Education and Training

Attainment and achievement for all to enable them to reach their potential.



Employment

Households are sustaining employment and are re-skilling to enable them to seek alternative employment.



Health and Wellbeing

Reduce health inequalities and promote wellbeing.



Housing

Everyone lives in warm, affordable homes.



Transport Connectivity

Everyone is able to get to where they want to go in a way that is affordable.



Digital Connectivity

Everyone is able to connect digitally and in a way that is affordable.



Community

Increase opportunities and empower people to fully participate in their communities and bring about change.



Working Collaboratively

Improve partnership working and networks through use of technology and media channels and training opportunities and projects to reduce poverty in the Scottish Borders.



Poverty Awareness and Responsibility

Everyone plays their part in understanding that tackling poverty is everyone's responsibility.



Signposting and Support

Develop and implement pathways to support people to move from dependence to independence.

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THE COST OF LIVING

Scottish Borders Council approved a report at their Council meeting on 25 August 2022 on support for the cost of living crisis. In recognition of the significant challenges that households were facing due to the increased costs of living, a financial support package of £1.2m was established to respond to the needs of communities. A short-term, multi-agency Cost of Living Crisis Strategic Group and an Operational Officers Group were also approved to provide an enhanced response.

These groups have reported into the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group and the Community Planning Partnership, and have also taken into account local requirements and responses across each of the five localities.

A strategic, targeted approach to respond to the cost of living crisis has been developed as a result of these groups, and information sharing 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.

An immediate allocation from the £1.2m financial support package of £0.585m was agreed which enabled a range of support to be put in place quickly. This included:

£235k

Warm Clothing grant of £100 to each child entitled to either Free School Meals or clothing grants - an initial 2,350 children benefited

£150k

Extending existing arrangements with organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Changeworks etc., to provide additional resources to assist with referrals, energy advice, money advice, signposting, and budgeting

£100k

Further top-up of Scottish Welfare Fund funding

£50k

Top-up Discretionary Housing Payment funding

£50k

Additional resources to be used to support and process increased uptake of benefits



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THE COST OF LIVING (cont.)

Since August 2022, proposals for the remaining £0.615m have been considered and approved by a Cost of Living Strategic Board as follows:

£100k

Expansion of the Inclusion Fund

£96k

Warm and Well, Youth Work Collaborative

£22k

Support Warm Spaces across the Borders

£15k

Energy training and food support

£13k

Live Borders - financial support to ClubSport members in relation to energy

£86k

Third Sector Interface and Live Borders, £50k for energy support, £36k for club membership, equipment and clothing support for sports clubs and organisations

£84k

Borders Housing Network, extension of the Warm and Well project, and provision of an additional resource to advise tenants

£60k

Breakfast club pilot for schools within the highest Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation areas

£34.5k

Additional funding to support increased uptake of £100 Warm Clothing grant – a further 345 children benefited

In relation to the Council's Financial Hardship Fund, the following allocations have been made from the £190k balance since August 2022:

£77k

Cyrenians

To provide community cook clubs in Selkirk, Galashiels, Jedburgh and Walkerburn

£21k

LOW&SLOW

To provide Low and Slow projects in Duns, Eyemouth, Galashiels, Hawick, Newcastleton and Peebles

£48k

EILDON GROUP
Living, Government Connected Centres

Support to Eildon Housing for Community FoodHub

£28k



Supermarket gift cards

£3k

FareShare
fighting hunger, tackling food waste

FareShare memberships for organisations across the Borders

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CHILD POVERTY

Since the Anti-Poverty Strategy was established in September 2021, two Child Poverty Annual Progress Reports have been published. These relate to **2021/22 progress** and **2022/23 progress**. Child Poverty Reporting is legislated by the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, which sets out the Scottish Government's statement of intent to eradicate child poverty in Scotland by 2030.

We continue to align to Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26, **Best Start, Bright Futures**. This sets out how we will work together to deliver on Scotland's national mission to tackle child poverty. It is a plan for all of Scotland and recognises the contribution that all parts of society must make to deliver the change needed for children and families.

Current significant challenges and positive opportunities are outlined below:

- Our children in low-income families (before housing costs) has risen from 14.6% in 2020/21 to 19.7% in 2021/22, similar to the trend for Scotland.
- 1 in 5 children still live in poverty (after housing costs) in the Scottish Borders
- There is a broad range of percentages of children living in relative low-income families in Scottish Borders Wards. The percentage ranges from 11.6% in the Tweeddale West Ward to 30.6% in the Hawick and Denholm Ward.
- 12.9% of Scottish Borders Households receive Universal Credit.
- The proportion of employees (18+) earning less than the real living wage in the Scottish Borders was 21.7% in 2021-22, notably higher than the Scottish average of 14.4%.
- The Borders Housing Network distributed over 2,200 fuel bank vouchers in 2022/23.
- There is an improvement in the gap between the Scottish Borders and the Scotland average for wages. In 2022, the gross weekly full-time workplace-based wage in the Scottish Borders was £69 less per week than the average for Scotland. In 2021, this was £96.
- 96.6% of young people have positive initial destinations when leaving school compared to 95.7% nationally (2021/22).
- Borders Modern Apprentice achievement rate is 81.5% compared to 75% nationally.
- Approximately 2,695 children benefited from a warm clothing payment of £100 paid from the Council's £1.2m cost of living support package.
- Nineteen schools and one community group will benefit from funding from the Council's cost of living support package to support free breakfast clubs across the Scottish Borders.
- Approximately 500 referrals were made for financial inclusion checks of mothers and pregnant women, this resulted in £1.25m in gains.

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FINANCIAL INCLUSION

A report on the Financial Inclusion Landscape across the Scottish Borders was prepared and discussed at the Community Planning Partnership Meeting in June 2021. This informed the Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan.

It provided an understanding of what the Community Planning Partnership organisations offer in respect of financial inclusion advice and support, to ensure that financial inclusion resources and activity would benefit those who most need support.

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

Community Care Assessors, Customer Service Advisors, and Housing Support Officers who meet people face-to-face or deal with calls are trained to provide basic advice about benefits, signpost and further refer to Citizens Advice Bureau or other specialists.

Officers making decisions on Discretionary Housing Payments and Scottish Welfare Fund can signpost and provide advice on benefits and other types of financial assistance.

Officers across the partnership also refer to third parties such as Home Energy Scotland, Department of Work and Pensions visiting team, Social Security Scotland, and other partners (Registered Social Landlords etc.) if this is more suitable for the person's circumstances.

There are generally good links between all of the organisations undertaking financial inclusion work across the partnership and in most cases referral processes are in place if required.

A Financial Inclusion Practitioners 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.

The Financial Inclusion Practitioners 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 is being discussed at a national level as an exemplary model of partnership working.

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THEME ONE | POCKETS

Maximising Income

Outcome: Maximise financial resources of households and reduce outgoing costs. Households can access services and be socially, digitally, and financially included.

Money Worries App

NHS Borders



A digital directory created to host information about support services available nationally and locally in the Scottish Borders. The user-friendly design and content are divided into four key areas; Money, Health, Housing and Work.

Since 2019...

1.6k
downloads

14.4k
screen views

25
colleagues
trained

4.2k
app log-ins/
sessions

Source: NHS Borders Joint Health Improvement Team

Training was adapted from NHS Highland's "Money Counts" training and allowed NHS Borders colleagues to better support signposting, raise awareness of the app and encourage real-time downloads.

Since the app was introduced, it is clear that users are engaging with more than one category as there has been a significant increase in both the number of screen views and sessions.

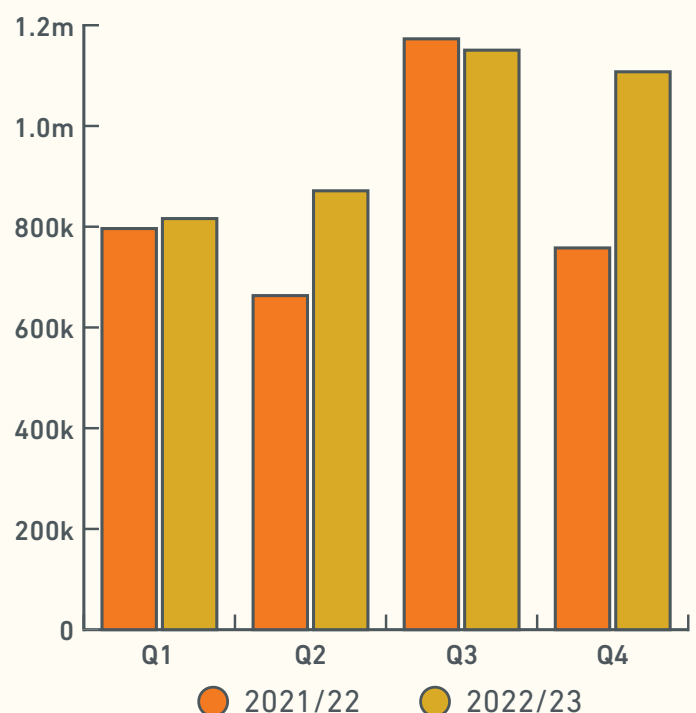
Monetary Gains

SBC Financial Inclusion Team

The SBC Financial Inclusion Team assist people throughout the Scottish Borders access benefits via advice, assistance or support. The monetary gain from successful benefit applications or tribunal appeals are measured and shown below, totalling over £7 million and helping 2,819 people since 2021.

Monetary Gain - Benefits

Source: Scottish Borders Council



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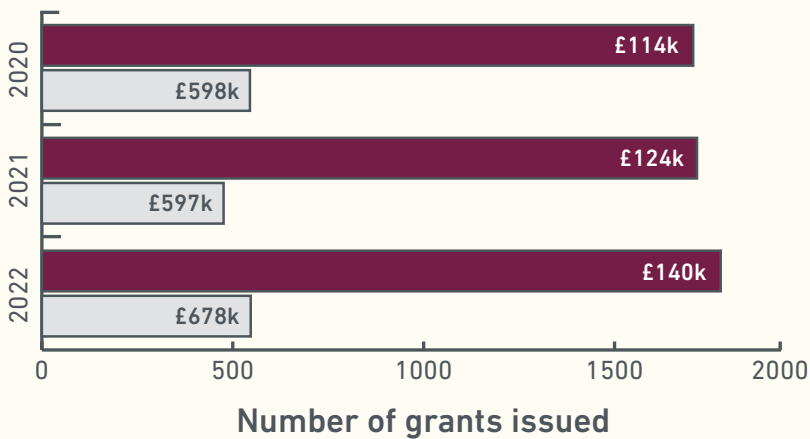
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THEME ONE | POCKETS

Maximising Income

Scottish Welfare Fund



Source: Scottish Borders Council

The Scottish Welfare Fund is administered in the Scottish Borders by Scottish Borders Council and is intended to help people on:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Pension Credit
- Universal Credit

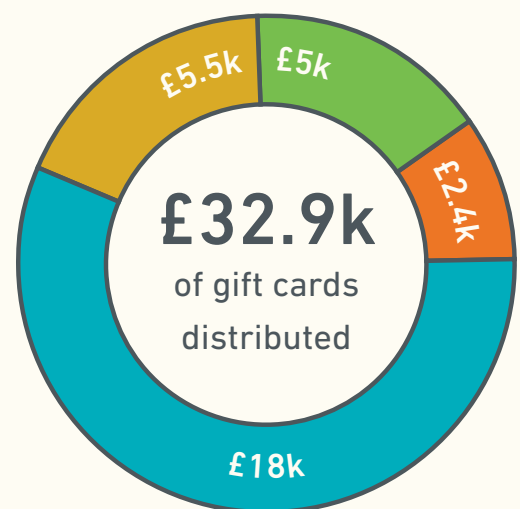
The Fund provides two types of grant:

- Crisis Grant
- Community Care Grant

Supermarket Gift Cards

Supermarket gift cards were distributed by Scottish Borders Council to over 20 partners such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Local Area Co-ordination Team, No One Left Behind, and food provision services and enabled targeted support to over 1,000 people in need.

“ We were able to give a £20 Co-op card to someone with no other support. The individual's benefits for this month only covered their gas bill. We have signposted the individual to Citizens Advice Bureau to set up a payment plan. This gift card helps to support them with groceries until the payment plan is active. - SBC Local Area Co-ordinator ”



- Violence Against Women Service
- Alcohol and Drugs Partnership
- Food Access
- Early Years Team

Source: Scottish Borders Council

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THEME ONE | POCKETS

Maximising Income

Social Security Scotland

Social Security Scotland is an Executive Agency of the Scottish Government. It is responsible for managing the benefits that are devolved to Scotland and ensures the people who need them get them correctly and fairly.



Social Security Scotland
Tèaranteachd Shòisealta Alba

Winter Heating Payment

The Winter Heating Payment is to help people on low income benefits who might have extra heating needs. Social Security Scotland pays this on an annual basis to people living in Scotland.

In the Scottish Borders...

6.6k payments
£331k paid to residents

Represents 2% of all Scottish payments
Winter 2022 - March 2023

Scottish Child Payment

The Scottish Child Payment is a weekly payment of £25 that parents and guardians can claim for every child that they are responsible for that is under 16 years of age in Scotland.

In the Scottish Borders...

45k payments
£4.4m paid to residents

Represents 2% of all Scottish payments
April 2022 - March 2023

Young Carer Grant

The Young Carer Grant is available to young people aged between 16 and 18 who are caring for someone who receives a disability benefit for an average of 16 hours a week.

In the Scottish Borders...

75 payments
£17k paid to residents

Represents 1% of all Scottish payments
2020/21 - 2022/23

Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods in the Scottish Borders

The Best Start Grant is made up of three, one-off payments: Pregnancy and Baby Payment, Early Learning Payment, and School Age Payment.

Best Starts Foods is a pre-paid card that can be used in shops or online to buy healthy foods like milk or fruit.



- Pregnancy and Baby
- Early Learning
- School Age
- Best Start Foods

Source: Social Security Scotland

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THEME ONE | POCKETS

Maximising Income

Eildon Housing Community FoodHub

The Eildon Housing Community FoodHub was set up to ensure the most vulnerable people and pets across the Scottish Borders have access to essential food and household items and to reduce their financial strain.

The FoodHub partnered with Edinburgh charities Cyrenians, FareShare, and Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home to redistribute donations across the Borders to address the growing need for access to food for individuals, families and their pets as a result of the pandemic and the rural location of communities in the Borders.

Since September 2021...

14
organisations
currently supported

97 tonnes
of food distributed
from FareShare

1,920
animals benefited



“
The FoodHub is essential to Food HUGS to be able to support the people of Walkerburn who are struggling due to the cost of living crisis. Food HUGS features in an SBC leaflet where you can get food support. So, without the food from FoodHub, we would no longer be able to offer this support.
Food HUGS, Walkerburn
”

“
The FoodHub has been a reliable source of food and has helped in making us sustainable in providing food to those that are in need. The FoodHub has been able to supply us with ambient and tinned goods which give us the assurance that we can provide the main source to meals.

In January 2023, we were open 18 days, we had 729 people attend our Larder. We were able to provide food to feed 2,181 people, 310 cats and 544 dogs.

Reston and Auchencrow Larder
”

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THEME TWO | PROSPECTS

Education and Training

Outcome: Attainment and achievement for all to enable them to reach their potential

On average, the Scottish Borders has significantly lower attainment in comparison to Scotland, with figures exacerbated within areas of deprivation.

Literacy

There is a 34.5% gap in educational performance or achievement (attainment) in the Borders for those living in the most deprived areas compared to those living in the least deprived. The average in Scotland is 24.7%.

Achievement of SCQF Level 5 (Nat 5)

Achievement of SCQF Level 5 for those in the most deprived areas (36%) is significantly lower in the Borders than the Scotland average of 49%.

Scottish Attainment Challenge

In March 2022, Scottish Government launched the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) with its mission to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.

The Scottish Attainment Challenge provides focused and targeted improvement activity in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across Scotland. It also supports and complements a broad range of initiatives and programmes to ensure that all of Scotland's children and young people reach their full potential.

To ensure that the Council's funding from Scottish Government has maximum impact and to improve outcomes at pace for children and young people impacted by poverty, the **Education Equity Strategy 2021-26** was developed. This includes the establishment of the Equity Strategic Board to oversee and provide governance of SAC funds and their use. The short-term outcomes of the strategy have been achieved and actions are in place to meet the outcomes for years 2-5.

Numeracy

There is a 28.1% gap in educational performance or achievement (attainment) in the Borders for those living in the most deprived areas compared to those living in the least deprived. The average in Scotland is 21.4%.

Achievement of SCQF Level 6 (Higher)

Achievement of SCQF Level 6 for those in the most deprived areas (15%) is significantly lower in the Borders than the Scotland average of 23%.



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THEME TWO | PROSPECTS

Education and Training

Inspire Learning

The Inspire Learning programme is a £16 million investment in a world-class digital learning environment for all pupils in the Scottish Borders. The project has been developed in partnership by Scottish Borders Council, CGI, XMA and Apple. The programme is a key part of the SBC Digital Learning Strategy and transforms teaching and learning in our schools for the benefit of children and young people now, and into the future.



This programme is aimed at raising attainment and supporting equity and inclusion for all children and young people. It is about investing in the learning of young people and putting them at the heart of education, improving outcomes and success for all. The effective deployment of digital technology in schools will ensure children and young people develop a level of general and specialist digital skills that are vital for learning, life and work in an increasingly digital world.

15,000

iPads have been distributed to pupils and school staff since 2019

3,600

pupils have attended Inspire Learning Festivals in 2022 and 2023

7

SBC staff are Apple Professional Learning Specialists

CGI



All Primary 6 and upwards classrooms have received audiovisual upgrades, including Apple TV. Early Years Centres up to Primary 5 classrooms will receive the same upgrades in 2023.

Each year, the Inspire Learning Team deliver "Live Lessons" for three stages of pupils and up to 30 schools, focussing on coding, sustainability, and health and wellbeing.



Source: Scottish Borders Council

Centre of Excellence for Digital Learning | Tweedbank, Galashiels

Opened in October 2022, the state-of-the-art facility provides a digital training space where equal access to technology will be available to young people, families, businesses and organisations and expands on the initial Inspire Learning investment. There are currently 14 pupils participating in an app development course, at the Centre, which has been designed to build and develop digital skills and prepare young people for an increasingly digital world of work.

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THEME TWO | PROSPECTS

Employment

Outcome: Households are sustaining employment and are re-skilling to enable them to seek alternative employment.

Scottish Borders Local Employment Partnership (LEP)

The LEP was established in 2021 with the vision:

"We will work together to deliver effective and easily understood employability and skills pathways focused on positive outcomes which are person-centred and lead to sustainable, fair and rewarding work."

In 2022/23, the selected interventions below have supported individuals into paid employment, many requiring in-work and ongoing support and overall, the partnership has engaged with over 500 individuals to support them on their route to employment.

No One Left Behind

Supporting people to reach a positive destination

Stage 1 engaged with 43 people
Stage 2 engaged with 30 people
Stage 3 engaged with 23 people
Stage 4 engaged with 28 people

Employment Support Service

Supports people of working age with additional barriers find and sustain paid employment

Engaged with 99 people, 19 of which have secured paid employment

Job Creation Scheme

Scottish Government fully-funded programme to help the long-term unemployed get back into work

There have been 24 new posts created in the Scottish Borders

Parental Employability Service

Supports parents by providing one-to-one employability support

PES has worked with 31 parents and nine parents have received SQA qualifications moving them towards their chosen goals

Kickstart Scheme

Scottish Borders Council acted as a gateway organisation for the Department of Work and Pensions Kickstart Scheme providing funding for 16-24 year-olds in receipt of Universal Credit, who were at risk of long-term unemployment

This intervention supported employers to create 80 Kickstart Scheme places which in turn led to 25 permanent job roles

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THEME TWO | PROSPECTS

Employment

Wages

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings produced by ONS (Office of National Statistics) and published on NOMIS³ contains information on wages.

Median Gross Weekly Pay in the Scottish Borders

£571

full-time workers,
working in the
Scottish Borders



12.1%

lower than the
Scottish average

£617

full-time workers,
living in the
Scottish Borders



3.7%

lower than the
Scottish average

The regional pay gap between Scottish Borders and Scotland has improved since 2020.

³ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

Living Wage in the Borders

As an accredited Real Living Wage employer, Scottish Borders Council is committed to encouraging the wider adoption of the Real Living Wage by partners, local employers, and suppliers. The Council has also included Modern Apprentices within the commitment to being a Real Living Wage employer going forward.

In September 2021, the Scottish Borders Living Wage Group announced that the locality area of Eildon was the next locality to benefit from a local approach to encourage more employers to commit to the Living Wage.

When the announcement was made, there were 37 Living Wage accredited employers in the Borders, 15 of which were in the Eildon area. More than 9,000 workers are covered by a Living Wage commitment in Eildon.

The action plan that was launched set out how the Eildon Living Wage Action Group aimed to double the number of accredited Living Wage employers in Eildon within the first year and triple it within 18 months.



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THEME TWO | PROSPECTS

Health and Wellbeing

Outcome: Reduce health inequalities and promote wellbeing.

Mental Health Support

Scottish Borders Council's mental health provision for young people, their families and Borders residents in general was enhanced in June 2021 with the launch of two new mental health and wellbeing support services.

Partnerships were commissioned with providers Kooth and Togetherall to offer services which help supplement and support the work already in place across the Borders. These partnerships offer holistic services from in-school wellbeing support to online counselling.



togetherall



SBC Healthier, Happier, Stronger Fund

A one-off fund has been made available in each Scottish Borders locality. Organisations in Berwickshire, Cheviot, Eildon, Teviot and Liddesdale, and Tweeddale can apply for up to £5,000 towards the cost of creating or running an activity or project that meets an identified need, namely that it provides nutritional, social, physical, emotional wellbeing, and/or mental wellbeing support to adults.

A co-produced approach is being used for the allocation of the funding, working in partnership with organisations such as Borders Community Action, Scottish Borders Social Enterprise Chamber and local communities, to ensure funding is allocated equitably within the Scottish Borders.

It has been funded by the Scottish Government to support the improvement of capacity within social care.



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THEME TWO | PROSPECTS

Health and Wellbeing

LOW&SLOW

The Low and Slow programme was developed as a holistic way of addressing health inequalities for families and individuals who may experience food and/or fuel poverty.

An initial eight-week project aimed to reduce fuel and food bills by providing a home energy assessment, advice and support, and slow cooking recipes.

The project is run as a partnership, with the initial pilot involving multiple organisations. As the project developed across the Scottish Borders, it has taken on varied partnerships including Cyrenians and various food provision services and has involved the Joint Health Improvement Team and energy advisors through all of the programmes.

16

Projects
Delivered

60

Programme
Participants

65

Slow Cookers
Distributed

6

REHIS Qualified
Participants

The total financial savings for all participating Low & Slow households was estimated at approximately £6,000. *Source: NHS Borders Joint Health Improvement Team*



“

I have thoroughly enjoyed the last 6 weeks. I had a breakdown last year and have been having panic attacks since so initially I was worried about attending but you guys made it enjoyable. It gave me something to look forward to and got me out the house, it's a shame the programme has come to an end.

Low & Slow Programme Beneficiary

”

“

Thank you for inviting me to the course. At first, I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to cope with the English language because in stressful situations I tend to forget some words but all of you made me feel very good.

Low & Slow Programme Beneficiary

”

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THEME TWO | PROSPECTS

Health and Wellbeing

Young People

As part of the Local Child Poverty Report and Action Plan, there are various actions being delivered by Scottish Borders Council and partners to provide financial, practical and emotional support, helping to tackle and mitigate the impact of poverty as well as preventing it.

Community-based youth work organisations to provide free or low-cost access to activities, experiences and trips during evenings and weekends.

5,021

young people engaged with Youth Borders

1,895

young people took part in summer grassroots activities

549

young people in receipt of Hardship Payment vouchers

1,170

young people took part in winter wellbeing activities

Co-ordination and development of Holiday Programmes for children and young people.

10.5k

visits to Live Borders 'Get into Summer' activities

62%

of places were free of charge for attendees

81%

of attendees felt more confident attending future activities

Run family learning programmes targeted at primary schools where there are the highest levels of poverty.

67

family learning programmes delivered

82%

of adults felt a reduction in isolation

74%

of adults felt their confidence as a parent had improved

“

We can't thank you enough for your help and support to allow the children experiences like this. Our travel expenses have increased because of the cost of living crisis. This funding enabled children to enjoy a fantastic day to socialise and reconnect with the outdoors.

*3rd Hawick Rainbows
Neighbourhood Support Fund*

”

Warm and Well: Youth Work Collaborative

£96,000 was allocated to Youth Borders to deliver additional youth work activities or enhance provision to keep young people warm and well over winter 2022/23.

1,488

young people directly benefited

280

youth work sessions attended

182

vouchers or care packs distributed

SBC Neighbourhood Support Fund

In 2022/23, the Neighbourhood Support Fund awarded approximately £42,000 to projects that directly benefited the wellbeing of young people.

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THEME TWO | PROSPECTS

Health and Wellbeing

Warm Spaces

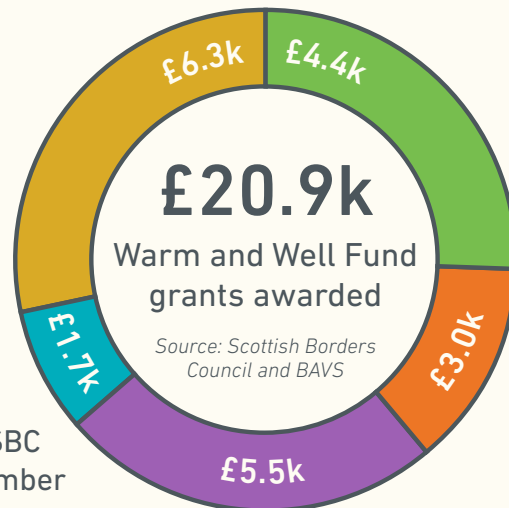
SBC Warm and Well Fund

The Warm and Well Fund was launched to support voluntary, community and charity organisations to provide a warm space.

In Berwickshire, 16 spaces benefited from SBC and National Lottery funding between November 2022 and March 2023. Over 200 warm space sessions were delivered, with over 4,000 people attending. The sessions were run by 10 paid staff and over 100 volunteers.

In Cheviot, St. Boswells Village Hall developed 'Warm-Up Wednesdays'. These sessions ran for 14 weeks, supporting over 200 community members. Through strong partnership working and use of community assets, the group provided varied activities from local musicians to NHS screenings. The local primary school joined the group on three occasions, singing, reciting poems, and playing board games with the attendees.

In Eildon, TD1 Youth Hub ran its 'Warm Hub' over two days, in a nine-week period, and in total supported 81 people. The additional hours were targeted towards parents and families, offering refreshments, toys, and a safe, warm space to relax together. Through their existing FareShare partnership, the group were able to offer 24 families additional support via excess food at the end of the week.



- Berwickshire
- Cheviot
- Eildon
- Teviot and Liddesdale
- Tweeddale

“It’s great that not only can I stay here and not worry about going home to an empty fridge and cold home, but you leave out all the toys and resources, so my son can enjoy taking part in things whilst here.”

TD1 Youth Hub Warm Hub Beneficiary

“I heard this was a place where I would be able to meet other people my own age and who have similar problems to me, its good they don’t judge you here.”

Over the weekend, it can be pretty rubbish as we aren’t at school, but taking home loads of scran from here on a Friday night means that Saturdays aren’t so bad.

TD1 Youth Hub Warm Hub Beneficiary

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

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THEME THREE | PLACES

Housing



Outcome: Everyone lives in warm, affordable homes.

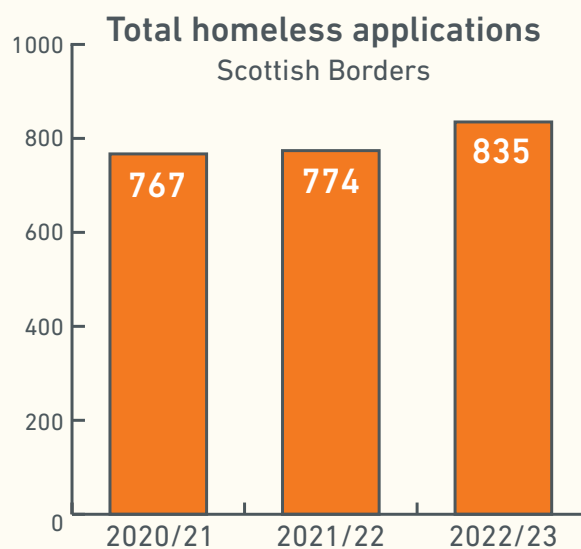
In 2021/22, Scottish Government allocated £18.6m towards new, affordable homes, allowing 314 to be delivered in the Borders. Of the 314 homes, Registered Social Landlords delivered 297. A further 16 individual home purchases have been assisted via the Open Market Shared Ownership mechanism and one long-term empty home was brought back into use via grant assistance from the Rural Housing Fund.

Alongside the **Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2022-27**, Scottish Government is estimated to invest £202m, with the proposed delivery of 1,213 new, affordable homes in the Borders.

Homelessness

In the Scottish Borders, the number of homeless applications has remained steady since 2011/12 as a result of a proactive approach to prevention through the delivery of the Housing Options approach.

During the pandemic, there was a noticeable reduction in homeless applications. In 2022/23, there were 835 applications in the Scottish Borders which is in keeping with the level of applications pre-pandemic.



Source: Scottish Borders Council

265

new referrals in
2021/22 to SBC Housing
Support Service

£31k

awarded from the Homelessness
Intervention Fund

“
At a time in my life which I found extremely challenging it was incredible to find such a wonderful and kind team of people to help get safely through it! I felt truly blessed.

Individual supported by SBC Housing Support Service

”

Homelessness Intervention Fund

The Homelessness Intervention Fund is administered by the Housing Support Service. The fund supports individuals and households in critical need and helps prevent homelessness for households in rent arrears or households at risk of losing their tenancy.



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THEME THREE | PLACES

Housing

Housing Support Service

The Housing Support Service forms part of Scottish Borders Council's Homelessness and Financial Support Team and consists of an internal Housing Support team and a commissioned service. Housing Support offers accessible, flexible and personalised support to individuals in critical need to enable them to secure, establish, manage, and maintain their home.

The Housing Support Service administers various benefits, including Housing Benefit and the Discretionary Housing Payment.

Housing Benefit

Housing Benefit is administered by Scottish Borders Council and is intended to help claimants with low incomes to pay their rent.

In 2022/23...

4,664

Housing Benefit claims

£21.5m

House Benefit paid out

Source: Scottish Borders Council

“ Huge amount of knowledge and skill with regards to tenancy issues. Provide flexibility and compassion for service users and an understanding as to the complexities of working with particularly vulnerable and, at times, challenging service users. **”**

SBC Housing Support Service partner feedback

Discretionary Housing Payment

Discretionary housing payment (DHP) is intended to help claimants who already receive housing benefit or Universal Credit but require further assistance to meet their housing costs.

In 2022/23...

1,832

DHP claims

£1.14m

DHP paid out

Source: Scottish Borders Council

Temporary Accommodation

Scottish Borders Council has experienced continued high demand for temporary accommodation post-pandemic in line with the national trend. In order to meet the unprecedented demand, SBC has increased temporary accommodation stock levels to 150 units as at 23 February 2023. The average stay in temporary accommodation is 169 days.

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THEME THREE | PLACES

Transport Connectivity

Outcome: Everyone is able to get to where they want to go in a way that is affordable.

Young Persons' (Under 22s) Free Bus Scheme

Legislation was approved by the Scottish Parliament in March 2021 enabling the introduction of a new statutory scheme to allow 5-18 year olds resident in Scotland to access free bus travel through the National Entitlement Card (NEC) and the Young Scot branded NEC (Young Scot card).

Following a further commitment made by the Scottish Government, legislation to allow the scheme to be extended to include those aged under 22 was approved by the Scottish Parliament in autumn 2021.

All young people and children aged 5-21 years can now apply for a card to access the Young Persons' (Under 22s) Free Bus Travel Scheme. Children under five years old already travel for free on buses and don't need a card.



In the Scottish Borders... *

50%

have claimed
free U22s pass

61k

monthly U22s
NEC transactions

24%

of operator
transactions are
from U22s

* Data from Borders Buses only - May 2023

Bus Travel Demand

Demand for bus travel remains significantly below pre-pandemic levels, especially amongst older people and disabled people. Whilst there has been a recovery on some travel corridors across the region, people's travel patterns have changed and it is anticipated that it will be some time before patronage returns to anywhere near 2019 trends.

Local Authority subsidies continue to support local bus operators but they have noted that since COVID-19, due to funding previously provided by Transport Scotland to help stabilise bus services being withdrawn, operating commercially continues to be of concern.

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THEME THREE | PLACES

Transport Connectivity

Pingo Demand Responsive Bus Service

Borders Buses, supported by Scottish Borders Council, launched the on-demand, app-enabled Pingo bus service, offering bespoke travel for Berwickshire journeys not served by a scheduled bus service.

PINGO
BUS TRAVEL ON DEMAND
Covering the Berwickshire area

The service began on 2 May 2022 and enables passengers to make bookings and track their journeys via an app, or alternatively make bookings by phone. It operates every day from 07:00 to 21:00, serving an area stretching from Cockburnspath and Eyemouth in the east to Coldstream in the south, and Greenlaw and Gordon in the west. This enables connections to be made with the main bus network in the area, and provides for those wishing to travel to parts of Berwickshire where there is no other bus service. It also offers trips to and from the Morrisons supermarket on the northern outskirts of Berwick, across the border in Northumberland.

Borders Buses
bringing people together

Pingo is available to fare-paying passengers and concessionary card holders. The cost is a £2 base fare plus 40p per mile, but that was reduced to £1 per journey during the first two weeks of operation.

Over

12k

journeys

40%

of users are
aged 22 or under

Since its introduction, Pingo has proved to be hugely successful in Berwickshire. The service has provided new transport opportunities for socially isolated residents and allowed both younger and older people to travel where they normally would not be able to without access to a car. On average, approximately 19% of Scottish Borders residents' income is spent on transport,

in comparison to residents in Edinburgh who spend around 8%. With the average income of full-time workers working in the Scottish Borders approximately 11% lower than the Scottish average and public transport prices rising, the Pingo service is a lifeline for those in rural areas of the Borders.

The Future of Pingo

Scottish Borders Council has committed to extend the initial pilot Pingo project and will continue to fund the service directly until March 2024. The future of the service will be dependent on the Council's Bus Network Review which will conclude in late 2023.

Source: Borders Buses and Scottish Borders Council



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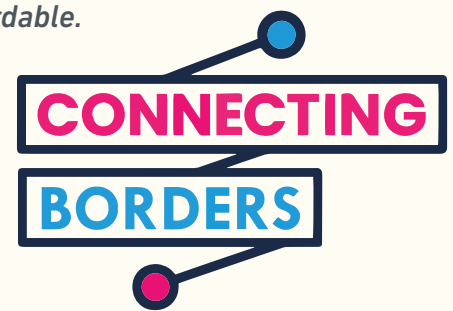
THEME THREE | PLACES

Digital Connectivity

Outcome: Everyone is able to connect digitally and in a way that is affordable.

Connecting Borders

Connecting Borders was an initiative created to provide digitally excluded households with devices, skills training and technical support to help them get online. It built on the success of a similar project co-ordinated by Connecting Scotland.



The aim was to support vulnerable individuals who face barriers to digital inclusion by providing them with:

A digital device: iPad or Chromebook

Internet connectivity: a mobile Wi-Fi hotspot (Mi-Fi) with 12 months unlimited data

Training and support: for staff to become digital champions to support people to use the devices and the internet, confidently and safely

44
digital
champions

£150k
SBC and SOSE funding
support

346
total referrals

Devices distributed

 chromebooks **173**

 iPads **115**

 Mi-Fi dongles **251**

330
approved
referrals

95%
referral approval rate

539
devices
distributed

Source: Live Borders

Connecting Borders initiative delivered in partnership with:



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THEME FOUR | PEOPLE

Community

Outcome: Increase opportunities and empower people to fully participate in their communities and bring about change.

Place Making

Place Making is a way of working together with people who live in an area to ensure a “bottom-up” approach and ensures that the community has the power to decide what its priorities are. Place Making is about everyone who has a stake in a community or place. It’s about people of all ages and interests, people who work or visit there, local businesses, voluntary organisations and public service providers, working together to determine local needs and priorities and to plan and deliver activities and projects that will address them.



Place Making recognises that communities are experts in terms of local knowledge, networks and understanding of local needs. People relate to the places or communities where they live and complex policies and issues make more sense when considered in the context of place rather than seen as abstract, separate agendas.

Officers are currently assisting with the delivery of Place Making in 56 of 69 community council areas across the Scottish Borders and are actively engaging with the remaining 13 communities to ascertain whether there is an appetite for Place Making.

The aim for communities is to create a place plan that highlights the improvements they would like in their area and allows potential funders to see how those aspirations will be achieved. Town teams or working groups are being established in communities to drive forward progress and ensure the Place Making process maintains its momentum.



[Visit the Place Programme webpage](#)

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THEME FOUR | PEOPLE

Community

Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal

The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal is a cross border agreement for investment into the five Borderlands local authorities: Cumbria, Carlisle and Northumberland in the North of England, and Dumfries and Galloway, and Scottish Borders in the South of Scotland.



The Borderlands Partnership exists to deliver green growth and attract new businesses and investment by improving connectivity, delivering skills and innovation, and improving places to support their longer-term resilience.

The Borderlands area...

Has over

1 million

population

Contributes

£23bn

to the UK economy

Has over

45,000

businesses

Covers

10%

of the UK land mass

In the Scottish Borders, there are four Borderlands towns...

Eyemouth

Eyemouth has hosted three engagement sessions since November 2022. At the most recent meeting in May 2023, several community members registered their interest in joining a Town Team to develop a new Place Plan for Eyemouth.

Galashiels

There have been two engagement events held in Galashiels since November 2022 and SBC Officers are currently working to attract a group of Galashiels residents to develop a Town Team that will lead the creation of a new Place Plan.

Jedburgh

Since November 2022, there have been two engagement sessions focused on Borderlands. A team from the community meet monthly and are currently mapping local groups and existing projects, and planning their engagement strategy.

Hawick

Community members in Hawick successfully organised and led their own "Have Your Say" engagement event, held in April 2023. They have since encouraged further engagement which will begin to shape the creation of a Place Plan for Hawick.

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THEME FOUR | PEOPLE

Community

Community Food Growing

Scottish Borders Council launched 'Cultivating Communities', the region's first ever **Community Food Growing Strategy** in March 2021 which covers a five-year period. In recognition of the importance of supporting community food growing as part of sustainable, resilient communities, SBC has invested in resources to support the delivery of the strategy. The investment includes supporting the creation of a community food growers network (Grow Borders Network) in the Scottish Borders, supporting and facilitating community growing in all its guises by providing guidance and resources for anyone who is interested in starting, or already running, a community growing project.



SBC Wilton Lodge Park Community Garden in 2022/23

27
volunteers



680
volunteer days



2,750
volunteer hours

£28k
awarded from SBC
Neighbourhood Support
Fund for food growing
projects in 2022/23

Grow Borders Network

52
members



18
monthly
newsletters



40
newsletter
subscribers



9
network
meetings



22
current
projects



6
potential
projects

Allotments and Gardens

There are currently 21 allotment sites across the Scottish Borders, six of which are managed by Scottish Borders Council.

There are also 19 community gardens and three community orchards, which can found on an [interactive map](#).



I come over on the bus from Galashiels every Wednesday to volunteer at the garden. It gets me out and I love being part of a group that's really welcoming and friendly. We get to take the veggies and fruit home which is an additional bonus. We always have a laugh and I enjoy the tea, biscuits and chat at the end.

Wilton Lodge Park Community Garden Volunteer



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ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY 2021

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THEME FOUR | PEOPLE

Poverty Awareness and Responsibility

Outcome: Everyone plays their part in understanding that tackling poverty is everyone's responsibility.

Community Planning Partnership

Scottish Borders Council works in partnership with a variety of different statutory and non-statutory partners as part of the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) to tackle poverty in the Borders. The CPP is developing a new Community Plan and the actions within the Anti-Poverty Strategy 2021 Action Plan make a significant contribution to the outcomes within each of the four themes:

- 1 - Enough money to live on
- 2 - Access to work, learning and training
- 3 - Enjoying good health and wellbeing
- 4 - A good place to grow up, live and enjoy a full life

NHS Borders Communities Team

The Communities Team works in partnership to reduce poverty and health inequalities and promote inclusion. The team leads on the co-ordination of project activities that build the capacity of partner agencies and communities to improve public health and wellbeing.



Skills Development Scotland

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is creating learning opportunities that help people get into and progress in rewarding work so that they develop the skills and competencies that drive productive businesses and regions, and help create a fairer, more equal society. By providing industry-focused skills, SDS aims to ensure that people have more skills which are relevant to the Scottish Economy, apprentices progress in employment, under-represented groups and people in poverty have improved apprenticeship participation and achievement rates, and more working age people access upskilling and retraining opportunities in priority sectors and occupations.



The Promise

Scottish Borders Council and partners recognise the potential for transformational change and agree that a shift from crisis intervention to early intervention and prevention is needed. A Plan is being developed to create a Whole Family Support Service with funding received from the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund of £668k.



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THEME FIVE | PARTNERSHIPS

Working Collaboratively

Outcome: Improve partnership working and networks through use of technology and media channels and training opportunities and projects to reduce poverty in the Scottish Borders.

Cost of Living Strategic and Operational Group

Scottish Borders Council approved a report at their Council meeting on 25 August 2022 on support for the cost of living crisis. A short-term, multi-agency Cost of Living Crisis Strategic Group and an Operational Officers Group were approved to provide an enhanced response. These groups have reported into the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group and the Community Planning Partnership, and have also taken into account local requirements and responses across each of the five localities.

Financial Inclusion Practitioners Group

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. The 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.

Food Conversations

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. 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.

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THEME SIX | PATHWAYS

Signposting and Support

Outcome: Develop and implement pathways to support people to move from dependence to independence.

Credit Union

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.

Cost of Living

In September 2022, Scottish Borders Council launched dedicated **Cost of Living webpages** to provide information on a wide variety of support available, such as financial assistance, help with energy costs and access to food, and warm spaces. There was also information on the Cost of Living Support Fund which was funded by the Council.

Challenge Poverty Week

Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders and other partners supported Challenge Poverty Week in October 2021 and 2022 by highlighting the wide range of information, advice and support available to support people experiencing financial hardship. A dedicated Challenge Poverty Week webpage was created and the campaign was publicised through social media channels. We will continue to participate in Challenge Poverty Week to signpost residents of the Scottish Borders towards areas of support.

What Matters Hubs

What Matters Hubs offer drop-in sessions and appointments where Scottish Borders residents can meet people from community groups and voluntary organisations as well as the Council's social workers and occupational therapists. The Hubs can also provide advice about Council's personal assessment process and eligibility criteria, the AskSARA online self-help guide and ALISS, the online directory of services, groups and activities that helps support health and wellbeing.

Financial Support and Inclusion

The Financial Support and Inclusion team at Scottish Borders Council is in place to provide advice on a range of different benefits as well as redundancy. The team can also provide training, talks and briefings, and can assist with the preparation of benefit appeals and represent benefit claimants at a tribunal.

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CONCLUSION

Scottish Borders Council and partners are committed to making a difference to people's lives by reducing poverty in the Scottish Borders, and it is clear from the progress shown in this report that it continues to be a prominent issue which partners take seriously. We are grateful for their contributions to this report as well as their actions on the ground which make a difference to those who need support.

There are still significant challenges ahead which must be tackled. This progress report has set out what has been done so far, and we are pleased to highlight such wide and varied activity and support, but there is more to do. It is more important than ever that we listen to the voices of those who have experience of living in poverty. Their feedback is valuable to us and it enables us to act accordingly to put further measures in place to help. Case studies throughout this report demonstrate that residents of the Scottish Borders are benefiting from such measures.

We will continue to raise the issue of poverty through the work of the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group, the Financial Inclusion Practitioners Group and the Food Conversations Group. The Community Planning Partnership will continue to play their part too, and we recognise their contribution through the actions within their four priority themes.

Together we will use our combined resources to achieve the best outcomes to tackle poverty, remove the stigma attached, and create opportunities for positive change for the residents of the Scottish Borders.