Salford City Anti-Poverty Strategy

Context

Salford has high levels of poverty and deprivation across the city. It is the 18th most deprived local authority area in England (out of 317) and the third most deprived local authority in Greater Manchester (Salford City Council, 2019).

Salford City Council has a long tradition of anti-poverty work and is recognised as a leader in Greater Manchester for its pioneering approach to addressing poverty at a local level.

In 2016, Salford City Council’s newly elected Mayor placed tackling poverty at the heart of his vision for ‘a fairer and better Salford’. In response to growing hardship for many residents in Salford, the City Council announced, in 2017, its new anti-poverty strategy: No One Left Behind: Tackling Poverty in Salford. The strategy set out the following themes, around which collective action centres: supporting people who are struggling in poverty now, preventing people from falling into poverty in the first place, and influencing the government and other national organisations to get a better deal for Salford people.

In 2021, working with organisations including GMPA, the council refreshed its second four-year Tackling Poverty Strategy as one of the three interlinked strategies launched under the ‘Salford Way’ (the other two being the inclusive and green economy strategy and the equalities and inclusion strategy), a key part of the council’s Great Eight Priorities. The aim of these strategies is to capture issues at a city-wide level, ensuring a coordinated approach at the full council level, and streamlining work to ensure a focus on tackling poverty.

The council feels it makes sense to have an overarching anti-poverty strategy that is dynamic and live. They highlighted when the strategy was refreshed, a major focus was on recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, however this year with the Cost-of-living Crisis the focus is also on strengthening the immediate response and support available to residents in the short term, alongside the long-term measures to tackle the root causes of poverty.

Whilst the council is acutely aware that there is no ‘magic bullet’ to tackle poverty at a local level, the strategy and its accompanying high-level action plan provide a clear agenda for actions to be taken, embedding an anti-poverty culture within the council, and putting those with lived experience of poverty at the heart of decision making.

Scope and design

Vision

The Strategy sets out Salford’s City Councils’ vision “to make Salford a fairer and more inclusive place where everyone can reach their full potential and live prosperous and fulfilling lives free from poverty and inequality”.

Poverty definition and identification of the drivers of poverty in Salford

The previous strategy outlined Salford’s definition of poverty. They primarily use median household income to measure levels of poverty - poverty is identified at occurring at the point when a household’s income is below 60% of the median after housing costs.

However, they are aware of the limitations of this definition, and so they have developed their own definition informed by the Salford Poverty Truth Commission and Joseph Rowntree Foundation. They define poverty as “applying to anyone who is denied, through low income or lack of resources, the opportunity to participate fully in the life of the community and have quality access to education, healthcare and leisure activities, as well as the necessities of life including good housing and adequate food and clothing”.

The previous strategy highlights the key causes and effects of poverty in Salford that have informed the priorities of the strategy. These include:

- Unemployment and underemployment
- Low pay
- Ineffective social security system
- Lack of skills and qualifications
- Household debt
- Poor physical and mental health
- High housing and living costs

Target population

The strategy is aimed at reducing poverty for people of all ages and circumstances. However, a key element of the strategy is focused on empowering individuals and communities to recognise poverty as a societal rather than individual problem and ensure that they feel part of the solution. This also includes a recognition that certain groups do face a higher risk of poverty and initiatives in the strategy seek to reflect this and understand the unique intersectional issues facing different communities. They identify the following groups:

- People with a disability or suffering from ill health
- Lone parents, larger families, and carers
- Children and young people
- Older people
- Some ethnic minority groups (including refugees and asylum seekers)
- People who are unemployed
- People experiencing homelessness

Funding

There is no single tackling poverty strategy budget; because the strategy works across all departments, funding streams are provided from all budgets relevant to the specific key actions set out in the strategy.
Development of Strategy

Partnership working

The strategies have been developed through extensive work with a number of local stakeholders both external and internal to the council. Salford’s approach emphasises that partnership working is an ongoing relationship, they do not see organisations as having to sign up to the strategy because they see the strategy as city-wide. It is about making poverty everyone’s business through the development and progression of the strategy. They keep it constantly under review so that they are continuing to develop networks, and as such, they do not require organisations to be involved from the beginning of the strategy. The stakeholders involved include the Salford Poverty Truth Commission, Salford Community and Voluntary Services (CVS), local housing associations, GMPA, and other VCSE sector organisations and council-delivered services.

Accompanying the strategies is a high-level action plan, and within that there are specific tasks focused on co-production and the development of the strategy to make sure it remains live. A key action for the Principal Policy Officer for Poverty and Inequality includes ensuring these actions within the plan are reviewed by key stakeholders both within and out with the city council to ensure a whole systems approach. For example, updating representatives on the implementation of specific initiatives within the strategy such as the socio-economic duty through the Salford CVS-facilitated VOCAL thematic forums.

Anti-Poverty Taskforce

In 2017, to support the strategy, the council, and the Sustainable Housing & Urban Studies Unit (SHUS) at the University of Salford established the Salford Anti-Poverty Taskforce (University of Salford, 2020). This was created to improve the lives of citizens experiencing poverty and inequality by providing high quality academic research underpinned by co-production and co-creation with key stakeholders, including those with lived experience.

This work fed into delivery of the anti-poverty strategy to ensure that policies have the greatest impact and are relevant to the issues that residents in Salford are facing, with recommendations from the research projects being implemented and actioned. Publication of the research has also provided the opportunity to raise awareness and lobby for policy change at a national level. Successful projects included an analysis of the experiences and barriers facing Salford’s young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET).

The council continues to work in collaboration with the University of Salford on anti-poverty issues, including a new three-year research project into underemployment.
The role of lived experience

From the very beginning, the council felt it was crucial to focus on co-production and co-development with people with lived experience of poverty. In addition to engaging with people’s feedback on policies which were already in place or due to be implemented. They emphasised to prevent it from being a tick-box exercise, they are constantly trying to improve and continue this relationship to ensure lived experience is embedded in the strategy.

The first Salford Poverty Truth Commission (PTC) was launched in July 2016, run externally as a partnership between Community Pride and Church Action on Poverty. It consisted of 15 people with lived experience of poverty and 15 people from businesses and public figures who came together to explore ways of addressing poverty.

Its recommendations have influenced key aspects of the Tackling Poverty Strategy. A key change included:

• A review of debt recovery/income collection systems: The PTC was instrumental in providing first-hand experience of how detrimental these processes can be to people’s lives. As a result of this, the council transformed its debt recovery policies to ensure they are as sensitive as possible and do not create further hardship for vulnerable people. They use people’s first non-payment of council tax as an early warning system, sending a personal letter/text offering support rather than an impersonal ‘you owe us’ letter. They have also stopped the use of enforcement agents when recovering debts from the most vulnerable residents who receive a council tax reduction. This change has had a positive impact on both residents and the council, which has seen an increase in revenue from council tax payments.

The second Salford PTC is currently ongoing, and the council emphasised that these would continue to be crucial to the development of future strategies.
Priorities

Like the previous strategy, the focus of the city’s collective efforts and resources is on the following three themes:

Preventing people from falling into poverty: Salford prioritises addressing the root causes of poverty, to achieve long-term sustainable poverty reduction. Some initiatives include:

- Becoming a Living Wage City. They have a task force, made up of public, private, and voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations which works to increase the number of businesses paying the Living Wage in Salford.
- Further developing and promoting the BetterOff Salford website: a platform that helps people find and apply for benefit entitlements and search for work opportunities. They also offer BetterOff coffee and chat drop-in sessions, providing face-to-face and online support to those facing a financial crisis.
- Delivering more homes to ensure people can afford to rent (private, social, and affordable) or buy in Salford. They are working with housing partners and have committed to 1,074 affordable homes and through the council’s ethical housing company Dérive, they are committed to directly delivering an additional 3,000 affordable homes over the coming years.

Providing targeted support for people struggling in poverty: Salford’s approach emphasises that whilst they are dedicated to preventing and reducing poverty, people are currently facing severe issues and as such, they require immediate assistance to cope with increasing financial emergencies in the aftermath of Covid-19 and the ongoing Cost-of-living Crisis. They are working to increase the support available to those who need immediate assistance. Some initiatives include:

- Strengthening and investing in Salford Assist - Salford’s local welfare assistance scheme. This provides short-term emergency help for people experiencing financial hardship such as food, fuel, and council tax support.
- Increasing investment in the council’s Welfare Rights and Debt Advice Service to ensure independent advice and representation on social welfare law (benefits and debt) to those facing a financial crisis or at risk of homelessness, as well as work with key partners including Adult Social Care, Children’s Services, and mental health services where advice at critical stages contributes towards prevention outcomes. Since January 2022, the service has achieved gains of £4.6 million for people in the city.
- Utilising the Get back on track campaign, which provides help for people struggling to pay their council tax bill. Salford continues to invest in stopping council tax debt from escalating.

Campaigning for long-term change in government policies and practices: Salford stresses that whilst they are doing all they can with the powers and resources they have available to address poverty, the main drivers of poverty lie with the national government. They focus on influencing the poverty debate, working with key local stakeholders, other Greater Manchester local authorities, and the GMCA to ensure poverty prevention and reduction gets a much higher profile through continuing to build an evidence base and campaigning for change. Some of the campaigning and influencing work they are seeking to do includes:

- Campaigning for a reversal of welfare changes made over the past decade such as benefits cap, bedroom tax and two-child limit.
- Working with GMPA and other partners across Greater Manchester to call on the government to develop a new national strategy for tackling poverty.
Delivering the strategy

The council wanted to make sure that there is also an action plan in place to deliver the strategy’s key ambitions which is kept under review and continually updated. The action plan presents what actions are already being implemented or proposed to be implemented to tackle poverty, key outcomes and timescales and the lead officer who is responsible for driving the work forward.

Responsibility

The council sees tackling poverty as being the responsibility of all council departments. They highlight that the existence of the strategy and adoption of the socio-economic duty has helped to embed a strong anti-poverty culture within the council (see adopt the socio-economic duty). To support the development of the strategy and action plan as well as developing networks within and outside of the council, they have a Principal Policy Officer for Poverty and Inequality.

Leadership

There is political leadership within the council on tackling poverty it sits with the Lead Member for Inclusive Economy, Anti-Poverty and Equalities. They highlighted that having political commitment has enabled greater prioritisation of poverty throughout all work.

However, since activity on delivery of the strategy falls across a number of different service areas and cabinet portfolios, progress and key decisions on specific areas also continue to be reported to each Lead Member alongside the Lead Member for Anti-Poverty. All three strategies under The Salford Way are also subject to a biannual progress update which includes going through both an internal and external governance process.

Socio-economic duty

The council has voluntarily implemented the socio-economic duty, informed, and influenced by our guide developed in partnership with several organisations on socio-economic implementation. They recognise it is an important mechanism to ensure that socio-economic disadvantage is embedded within all decision-making processes, across all council services. As part of its implementation, the council created a dedicated toolkit for the incorporation of the duty into the equality impact assessment process. A detailed framework was designed for elected members and council services, which highlighted best practise and guidance in using the duty. This was supported by an integrated training programme.

To support the implementation process, the council had a ‘soft launch’ period allowing them to explore how the duty could be best utilised to avoid it becoming a ‘tick box’ exercise, before following this up with an evaluation after six months. This evaluation is currently underway, with initial findings suggesting that the duty is complementing and strengthening work to reduce inequality of outcomes.

Links to other strategies

The council has several other strategies that the Tackling Poverty Strategy aligns with and supports the delivery of. The key ones being the Inclusive and Green Economy Strategy; the Equalities and Inclusion Strategy; Salford’s Homelessness Strategy; and the city’s Locality Plan 2020-2025. This is in recognition that inequality is interlinked and that all parts of the system have a key role to play in tackling this issue. The council is working to make sure actions in each of the strategies are as integrated as possible with the anti-poverty work to achieve the most holistic and preventative approach. For example, within the action plan, there are key actions around the other strategies which involve the Principal Officer for Poverty and Inequality attending the working groups for these to keep updated on work that is being done and to see how it can be integrated for maximum impact.
**Monitoring and evaluation**

The council recognises that integral to delivery is being transparent with how the strategy is working. The strategy itself highlights how it will measure its success, for example, by fewer young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), an increase in average household incomes and wages, and an increase in the number of children deemed school ready.

However, the accompanying action plan sets out the key actions that underpin each of the strategic priorities with specific measurable outcomes/milestones. The council is focused on increasing the collection and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data to build a robust understanding of poverty at a localised level, and how national-level policies are reflected in the data and use this to inform service delivery. It sets out short-term (up to 12 months) and longer-term (over 12 months) targets. Key outcomes/milestones include:

- Increasing the number of accredited living wage employers in the city with reference to the Living Wage Action Plan to meet the target of 70 accredited employers by 2022.
- Continuing to regularly use all appropriate channels to encourage uptake amongst local people of all available support to help them avoid/combat poverty.
- Highlighting the rise in child poverty and the impact of this at both a local and national level, campaigning for a centralised strategy alongside GMPA that allocates sufficient resources and promotes better outcomes for children from low-income households.

The council emphasised that in light of the Cost-of-living Crisis, some metrics will most likely get worse, therefore they are making sure to upscale the evidence base of case studies. They are using these to keep under review how things can be done differently and how they can achieve more by utilising new initiatives and integration of data.

**The Salford Way: Integrated evidence base**

The council is committed to being open and transparent about how the strategy is working, they have developed a public-facing, integrated evidence base, which uses core indicators from each of the three interlinked Salford Way strategies to show how the council is working across the priorities. It shows selected statistics on poverty in Salford such as earnings and income, living-wage employers, and child poverty levels, broken down into wards.

**Oversight and governance**

The council has a range of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the strategy which is both internal (with an anti-poverty operational group, that monitor, scrutinise, make recommendations, and share best practice) and external (it is governed by the Salford Health and Wellbeing Board, which works across the city partners). The evaluation is used to add other elements to the strategy as the wider situation changes, as well as measure the current impact of the strategy.

**Salford Health and Wellbeing Board**

The Salford Health and Wellbeing Board has overall responsibility for monitoring and measuring the impact of the strategy and reporting progress through publishing an annual progress report for stakeholders and the wider public to view. The council highlighted that its role is important to the strategy as it provides an objective and expert point of support for the delivery of the key actions in strategy and ensures that actions being implemented at a practical level are streamlined with other relevant strategies such as Salford’s Locality Plan 2020-25 to reduce social, economic and health inequalities.