

Cambridge City Anti-Poverty Strategy

Context

Cambridge City Council is a district council in the county of Cambridgeshire, in the East of England. Cambridge is a wealthy, fast-growing city with a strong economy and significant employment growth in the science and technology sectors. A study from Cambridge Ahead (2021) shows that companies that work in the knowledge-intensive industry accounted for 28% of employment and 38% of the total £18 billion turnover in Cambridge.

Nevertheless, Cambridge was identified by the Centre for Cities in 2017 as the most unequal city in the UK. There is a significant divide in the city- the top 6% of earners who live in Cambridge take home 19% of the total income generated by residents, while the bottom 20% of people account for just 2% of the total (Ferguson, 2020). A significant proportion of people are experiencing poverty due to low incomes, lack of skills and qualifications, and rapidly increasing housing costs. Poverty is concentrated in wards and neighbourhoods that are primarily in the North and East of the city.

Below we highlight key figures from the strategy which demonstrate that the city's prosperity is not shared by all:

- One in 10 people receive weekly pay (£162) which is less than 30% of the average weekly pay (£555) in the city.
- There is a low level of social mobility and outcomes are poor for young people from poorer backgrounds, with Cambridge having the fifth lowest score of any local authority for youth social mobility.
- In 2019, residents in the most deprived ward in Cambridge lived 11.6 years less on average than residents in the least deprived ward.

In light of this inequality, the council's vision 'One Cambridge - Fair for All' prioritises tackling poverty and social exclusion. The Corporate plan 2022-27 sets out the council's four key priorities, priority two 'tackling poverty and inequality and helping people in the greatest need' outlines the council's anti-poverty strategy and accompanying action plan for 2020 to 2023. The council's approach focuses on tackling both the underlying causes and immediate effects of poverty.

They have had two previous strategies covering the periods from 2014 to 2017 and 2017 to 2020, both strategies aimed to raise the standards of living for people in poverty and address the issues which lead to financial pressures. They highlight there have been improvements in a number of areas such as an increase in earnings for low-income households and building council-owned homes at an affordable rent.

However, the focus of the strategy's approach has changed over time and the revised strategy builds on learnings from previous strategies and the latest evidence on the nature of poverty in Cambridge. In particular, the council has recognised the need for a greater focus on preventative work in partnership with key local partners to address some of the root causes of poverty.

Scope and design

Vision

The strategy sets out the council's vision, *"we want to build a fairer Cambridge and help improve the standard of living for individuals and communities on a low income in the city"*.

Poverty definition and identification of the drivers of poverty in Cambridge

The council defines poverty using the most common definition which is relative income poverty-where households have less than 60% of median income.

The strategy outlines the causes and effects of poverty, combining the issues identified by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation with consultation responses from key local stakeholders and residents. The causes identified include:

- Difficulty meeting basic needs such as food and fuel costs
- Digital exclusion
- Low level of skills or education
- Impacts of welfare reforms
- Lack of financial literacy

Funding

The council emphasises that the availability of funding has been a challenge due to central government funding cuts which has meant discretionary funding is limited. The strategy is rooted in partnership working as the council recognises they need to work closely in partnership with local organisations and communities to develop creative solutions.

Therefore, the strategy primarily seeks to co-ordinate and re-focus city council activities so that it focuses on tackling poverty where possible. The council is funding the actions in the strategy by:

- Mainstream service budgets, through the council's mainstream services, either directly or in partnership with other organisations.
- Funding grants through the council's community grants and homelessness prevention grants to support voluntary and community organisations. For the period of the strategy, the criteria for grant funding are for projects that are working to address socio-economic disadvantage.

Development of the strategy

Partnership working

The previous strategies were developed through available data and evidence on poverty in Cambridge and extensive consultation with partner organisations and residents. The revised strategy has built on this evidence base, and the council has undertaken further consultation to develop a shared understanding of poverty, identify further opportunities for joint working and influence anti-poverty work in the city.

This has included:

- Engagement with residents at a range of community groups in Abbey, Arbury, Kings Hedges, and Trumpington (facilitated by Abbey People, North Cambridge Community Partnership, Hands on the Circle, and the council's community development team)
- A stakeholder workshop attended by representatives from 18 public, private, and voluntary sector organisations that support people in poverty
- Two workshops for council frontline staff who support residents in poverty and engagement with management teams in key council services (Community Services, Environmental Services, Housing Services, Planning, Repairs and Maintenance, and Revenues and Benefits)

Lived experience engagement

The council highlighted that engagement with people with lived experience of poverty has been on a consultation basis, but the council is now moving to a model of co-production for the development and delivery of interventions associated with the strategy. The council has found engagement has been most effective when they have worked through trusted organisations as they understand sometimes people do not want to speak directly to the local authority without an introduction from an organisation working with them in a support capacity.

Priorities

The strategy sets out three underpinning themes for the council's approach:

- 1.** Combining ongoing efforts to address the effects of poverty, with a further focus on preventative work (in partnership with other organisations) to address some of the root causes of poverty. The council has evolved its approach; initially the council prioritised addressing the immediate effects of poverty, while they now have a greater focus on the causes of poverty.
- 2.** Balancing direct council service delivery, partnership-working and influencing, and lobbying activity where it will have a greater impact. The council outlines its sphere of influence in relation to poverty. To ensure there is a clear understanding of the role everybody plays, the council is seeking to use the strategy to identify:
 - Which issues can be addressed by direct delivery by council services;
 - Which issues can be achieved through partnership working; and
 - Which issues require influencing and lobbying activity (where power lies with the central government) to bring about change and secure funding.
- 3.** Building the capacity and resilience of residents and communities and facilitating community action. The council is focused on working collaboratively with residents, community groups, and voluntary groups to identify solutions to address poverty.

Strategic objectives

The strategy sets out five objectives to reduce poverty over three years and 58 associated actions structured around the strategy's underpinning themes (city council actions, partnership actions, and influencing and lobbying actions).

We outline the five objectives and a selection of key activities that will be undertaken to achieve them:

1. Helping people on low incomes to maximise their income and minimise their costs.

- City council actions: Paying council staff at least the Real Living Wage, and ensuring contractors do the same.

2. Strengthening families and communities, including supporting groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty.

- There are concentrations of poverty in particular localities in Cambridge, the council is working with partner organisations to develop area-based approaches, building on the county council-led "Think Communities" approach and other multi-agency initiatives.

3. Promoting an inclusive economy, by raising skills and improving access to a range of employment opportunities for people on low incomes.

- Influencing and lobbying actions: The council will lobby the government on relevant economic policy issues and seek to influence the strategic approach of the Greater Cambridge Partnership and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, which is responsible for key economic strategies including the Local Industrial Strategy and the Local Transport Plan.

4. Addressing the high cost of housing, improve housing conditions, and reduce homelessness.

- City council actions: The council has an ambitious programme to deliver at least 500 new council homes over 5 years following £70m funding via the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Devolution Deal.

5. Improving health outcomes for people on a low income.

- City council actions: Providing a 50% reduction in entry prices at Council-owned sports and swimming facilities for people receiving benefits.

Delivering the strategy

The action plan sets out the key activities that the council plans to undertake to help achieve each of the objectives. It highlights which actions will be achieved through direct service delivery, partnership working, or influencing and lobbying. It is a live document that is regularly reviewed and updated, with new activity added to respond to emerging issues relating to poverty in the city.

Responsibility

From the outset, the council aimed to ensure the strategy was embedded across all key services. The council's action plan highlights different council services have a responsibility for key actions to achieve the strategic objectives such as revenues and benefits, housing services and community services. The strategy brings together work that is already the responsibility of services, but challenges services to take forward additional activities and projects where issues have been identified.

The strategy emphasises that the city council cannot deliver work on its own. Through the development of the strategy, they have identified opportunities for joint working, and they are working closely with key local stakeholders to deliver the actions set out in the strategy.

Leadership

The strategy has high-level political support and leadership. The Assistant Chief Executive of the council leads on anti-poverty and there is an Executive Councillor for Equalities, Anti-Poverty and Well-being. The council highlights having an executive councillor with anti-poverty as a named responsibility provides council officers with a specific person to report to and supports political leadership on the council on the issue of poverty.

Links to other strategies

The council highlights that poverty is well-established as a key issue for the council, the strategy is cross-cutting, and many of the council's services have contributed to the development and delivery of the strategy, either through delivering actions or through re-focusing existing services. The strategy is not intended to replace existing strategies, rather it exists to complement, strengthen, and add to the work council departments are doing to address poverty. In particular, the strategy has clear links to, and aligns with the following strategies: Housing Strategy, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Local Plan.

Monitoring and evaluation

The action plan sets out performance measures, expected outcomes and completion dates for the 58 actions structured around the five strategic objectives and underpinning themes. The performance measures relate to the expected outputs from the actions. Where projects are in the early stages of development, or it is difficult to identify tangible outputs they have highlighted clear project milestones that will be achieved by the completion date.

The action plan includes the following types of performance measures and outcomes:

- Increasing the number of Cambridge employers that have achieved Living Wage accreditation.
- Increasing the number of community days held in low income areas of the city.
- Increasing the number of additional apprenticeships created across the Greater Cambridge area.
- Increasing the number of new homes for rent provided annually on council owned sites.
- Repurposing the existing library card as a 'smart' universal passport to learning.

Indicators for measuring poverty in Cambridge

Due to the difficulty in measuring levels of poverty at a local level the council has identified high-level indicators in the strategy that are used to measure poverty in Cambridge, structured around the five objectives of the strategy. The council highlights having a clear set of indicators is essential for them to monitor the combined impact of council and partner organisations actions on poverty, tracking changes in the local and national economy and measuring the effects of government policy on poverty.

Key measures include:

- Total number of people living in households claiming Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.
- Percentage of pupils receiving Free School Meals achieving Grades 9 to 4 in GCSE English and Maths.
- Gap in life expectancy between the least and most deprived areas in Cambridge.
- The percentage of households in Cambridge experiencing fuel poverty.

Oversight and governance

Progress on the key actions and performance measures are reported to the Strategy and Resources Committee on a regular basis. The council produces a public facing annual progress report that updates on the delivery of the key actions.