

## Leicester City Anti-Poverty Strategy

### Context

Leicester City Council is a unitary authority in the East Midlands city of Leicester. It has some of the most deprived communities in the country and is ranked the 32nd most deprived local authority in England (out of 317). Overall deprivation is primarily driven by deprivation in income, education, skills, and training:

- In Leicester, the average person earns £22,157 a year, a figure that has fallen by around £1,000 since 2013. In contrast, average earnings in England have risen by approximately £3,000 over the same period.
- 28% of Leicester's adult working population are residents in the 5% most deprived areas nationally. 52% are living in the 20% most deprived areas.
- A high proportion of residents in Leicester have no recognised qualifications, the percentage is 2.5 times higher than the national average.

When the City Mayor was re-elected in 2019, the Mayor's vision set out a number of pledges to fulfil ambitions to improve the city region. Under the 'A fair city' pledge was a commitment to 'fight against austerity' and develop an anti-poverty strategy in the first year of the new term. The development of the strategy was undertaken at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020; however, publication of the strategy was delayed until early 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The council highlights it is realistic in its approach to addressing poverty as many of the causes of poverty are driven by factors outside of local control. Nevertheless, the strategy is focused on enabling the council and its key partners to better understand the nature and impact of poverty on people that use their services to improve services and/or develop new ones.

We have chosen this case study as unlike the other strategies, the council did not want it to be a paper-based strategy. Instead, the council's anti-poverty framework and approach are on a microsite. The council emphasised that using a microsite allows for the strategy to be constantly updated as the national and local situation changes.

### Scope and design

#### Vision

The council sets out its vision in the strategy, *"our vision is that every citizen of Leicester is happy, healthy, engaged in their community and not held back by poverty and its impacts"*.

#### Poverty definition and identification of the drivers of poverty in Leicester

The council defines poverty using the relative poverty definition- if a household's income is less than 60% of the average. They emphasise while all people in poverty have a lack of money, poverty means different things to different people. They state *"you are poor if you are unable to live at the standard that most other people would expect. A child can have three meals a day, warm clothes, and go to school, but still be poor because their parents do not have enough money to ensure they can live in a warm home, have access to a computer to do their homework, or go on the same school trips as their classmates"*.

The strategy cites a Joseph Rowntree Foundation report that concludes poverty levels are driven by changes to four main factors: employment rate, earnings, benefits, and other incomes such as pensions and housing costs (JRF, 2016). The strategy is structured around the policy of some of these factors that can be influenced at a local level.

## Target population

It is important for the council to consider that poverty affects people in different ways. Leicester is home to a number of diverse communities, and as such services must be tailored to the appropriate community and their needs. The strategy is strongly aligned with the council's Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy 2018-2022 which requires all proposed service developments and changes to be assessed for their impact on groups of people with "protected characteristics". The strategy highlights the following groups that are at a higher risk of poverty in Leicester including children, social renters, home carers, the long-term sick or disabled, LGBT communities, women, ethnic groups, and older people.

## Funding

The strategy does not have specific funding due to budgetary constraints. Instead, the council is focusing on maintaining funding for existing strategies and plans that are already in place to reduce poverty and offering grants to local organisations. When the council is making any changes to programmes due to funding, they now need to look at poverty data to assess what service decisions should be made. The council emphasised the strategy is about developing what is already in the city and making it sustainable.

They have launched an Anti-Poverty Community Grants scheme which offers grants to local organisations to develop and design projects that align with one or more of the council's anti-poverty objectives and deliver specific benefits to groups living in Leicester who are more at risk of living in poverty. £250,000 funding will be available each year from 2022 to 2025, and they are running multiple rounds of application.

## Development of the strategy

To develop the strategy, the council spoke to over 500 people. They held a summit involving representatives from the council, NHS, advice agencies, voluntary and community organisations, and focus groups with people with lived experience of poverty. They used the engagement to understand the barriers people are facing living in poverty, gathered poverty data from a number of organisations, and mapped support services in the city.

## Partnership working

The summit with key local partners highlighted a number of issues that the strategy needed to focus on improving including:

- Lack of awareness about the anti-poverty work of the council: the microsite now contains details on current and future council policies and funding.
- Limited access to data on poverty levels in Leicester: organisations faced difficulties in accessing data to support bids and could often spend significant time looking for this data. The microsite now holds data across poverty indicators the council has access to, alongside data collected by other organisations. This ensures this data is easily accessible to VCSE groups.

## Lived experience engagement

The council held focus groups with people with lived experience of poverty to determine what residents felt an anti-poverty strategy should address and what schemes had been of benefit to them. One of the key findings that came out of the lived experience engagement was that residents felt there is a stigma attached to living in poverty, and they were hesitant to access services if they felt the language was ‘demeaning’ or ‘belittling’. The council emphasised they are now more aware of the importance of using language that is empowering to residents rather than demoralising.

The council highlighted that the strategy could not have been developed without involving people with lived experience.

## Priorities

The council has developed an anti-poverty framework to better understand the issues people experiencing poverty in Leicester are facing. Below we outline a summary of the four-ring strategic framework:

- It begins with the key elements that need to be in place for people to live a comfortable life to a standard that we all should expect, these include food and clothing, homes and furniture, money, and advice.
- “Enablers” then surround key elements, these include access to advice and services, childcare and schools, and transport.
- The themes of health and well-being and jobs and skills are the next ring, which can only be achieved when basic needs are met, or support is provided from “enablers”. The council emphasises that the absence of any of the inner sections of the framework will have a negative effect on an individual’s health, well-being, and social environment.
- Surrounding the whole framework is “community”, the council recognises the importance of support from a strong social and community network. The microsite is structured around the strategic framework’s key elements and enablers, and each includes key findings from engagement with local partners and people with lived experience of poverty, as well as actions the council is taking, and its future intentions.

A selection of the key actions and intentions are:

- Homes, furniture, and utilities: commissioning advice services in the community that support residents to manage their bills and access emergency gas and electricity credit; and providing seed funding for a voluntary sector project to refurbish white goods for low-income households.
- Food and clothing: promoting and working to increase the take up of healthy start and free school meals by eligible families; providing seed funding for a project to reuse school uniform items around the city.
- Money debt and advice: investing in an online platform (Betteroff) to provide guidance to increase benefit take up and help residents maximise their eligible benefit income; implementing a payday advance system for council staff experiencing financial difficulties.

The strategy has five objectives, which are grouped around prevention, crisis support, short, medium, and long-term actions, and national lobbying.

1. Identifying services that support Leicester’s residents to avoid falling into poverty.
2. Ensuring crisis information and services are easy to access and meet the needs of Leicester’s residents and the staff/volunteers in organisations that support them.
3. Improving support to people experiencing poverty in the short and medium term, increasing choice and independence.
4. Improving systems and the infrastructure of support in the longer term
5. Campaigning and lobbying for change at a national level to alleviate poverty in the long term.

## Delivering the strategy

### Responsibility

The council emphasises that tackling poverty is not something the council can do alone, a theme which is key to the design of the strategy. They have received city wide support from a variety of organisations, including those in the business sector, who have recognised that they have got an important role to play in supporting employees in a variety of ways.

### Anti-Poverty Partner Network

A key element of the strategy has been the formation of a network of anti-poverty partners. Partners who join the network commit to working towards the objectives of the strategy and submit their own action plan highlighting the work they are doing or plan to undertake and how they will measure impact to achieve the strategies objectives. The network is in its early days, but the aim is to create a city region that is full of organisations committed to combatting poverty and to strengthen collaboration between organisations. Once fully developed the council will publicise these actions to provide ideas for organisations that do not yet know how they can make a difference to addressing poverty. Partners will be asked to provide updates to the council on their progress to demonstrate impact.

## Leadership

The anti-poverty strategy has high level political support and leadership. The Deputy Mayor is responsible for social care and anti-poverty and leads on the development and delivery of the strategy. The council emphasised that the strategy could not have gone forward in the way that it has without supportive political leadership. This leadership has had the effect of unlocking doors for council officers and generating greater buy-in from external organisations.

### Links to other strategies

The council highlights that the strategy sits alongside and is underpinned by other strategies on the economy, climate emergency, health inequalities and Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy.

### Monitoring and evaluation

The strategy was launched in early 2022, and as such the council has not yet monitored its impact. The council will be using quantitative and qualitative data to monitor the intended outcomes as they emphasise that quantitative data does not always show the full picture.

The first evaluation will be asking partners about the impact the strategy has had on the work they do in the city, as one of the key elements of the strategy is the development of a partners' network and upskilling organisations to adopt to the changing picture of poverty. The council wants to understand if the strategy has enabled a better understanding of poverty and greater sharing of best practice among partner organisations. Additionally, it will consider whether the provision of easily accessible data has helped local organisations in their anti-poverty work.

### Oversight and governance

The council is forming a panel convened by council officers who will have oversight of the anti-poverty work across the city. They will be responsible for liaising with partners about anti-poverty work and assessing and accrediting new organisations and individuals who propose to deliver actions that meet the objectives set out in the strategy.