

# East Devon District Council Anti-Poverty Strategy

## Introduction and Context

East Devon is a prosperous area for many. It has a strong economy, driven by a combination of small businesses, agriculture, tourism, the service sector, and a significant cluster of hi-tech and bio-technology businesses.

However, despite the continuing growth of the East Devon economy, we have identified pockets of poverty, using measures which takes into account data on wages, pensions, benefits and other income. While some jobs in the district command very high salaries, there are a significant proportion of households in the area living on low incomes, or in poverty.

The incidence of poverty is unbelievably high for the 2020's and a sad reflection of the failure of social policy and societies priorities. The Covid-19 pandemic is making matters worse for many. Poverty is a serious equalities issue for modern society. This is evident internationally, nationally and locally. We live in an inequitably society with vast differences between those that are 'well off' and those who have insufficient to meet their basic needs.

We are seeing increased levels of debt with many households taking on debt to make ends meet, leading to problems in prioritising debts and incurring high interest on debts. This has been combined with an increase in food bank usage. There are important safeguarding links with poverty and the impact on vulnerable households needs careful consideration and intervention.

Poverty is defined in different ways including not having enough possessions or income for a person's needs; the condition of being extremely poor; a person or community that lacks the financial resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living; household income below 60% of the average.

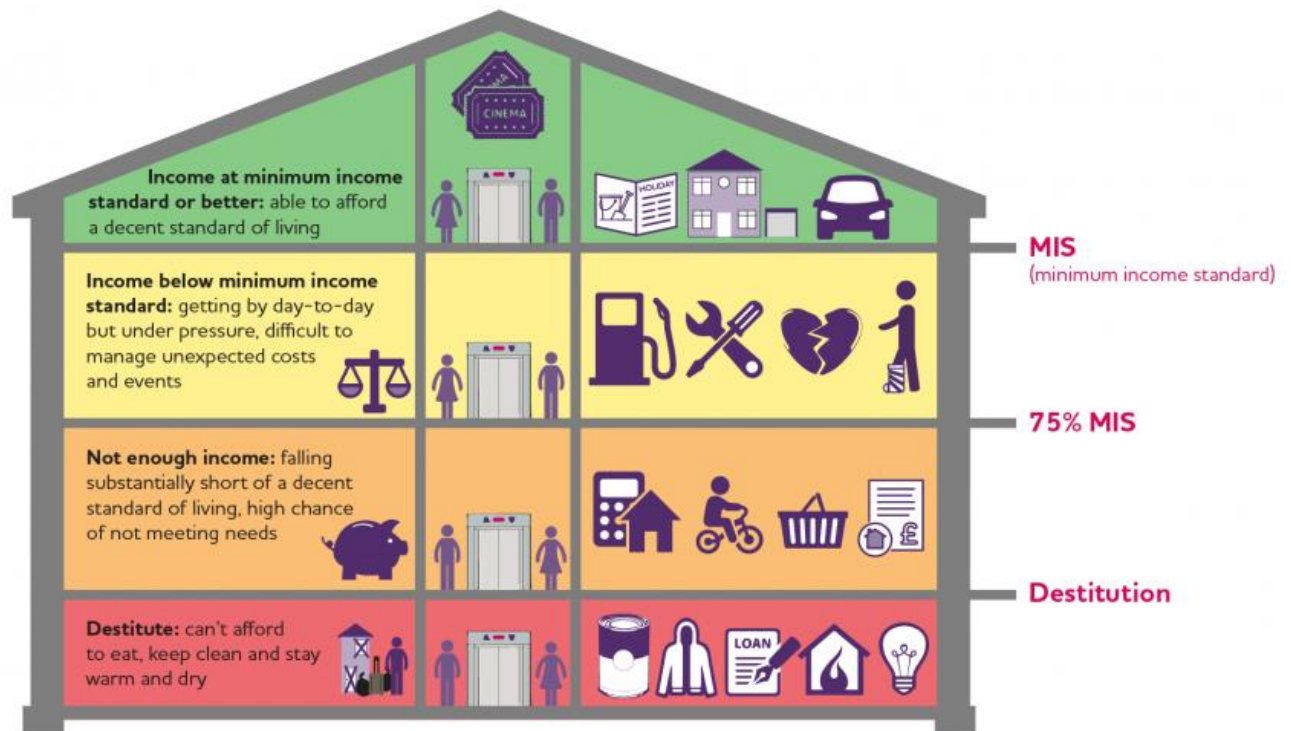
Through national studies six types of poverty have been recognised – situational; generational; absolute; relative; urban; and rural.

Poverty has been defined simply as not having enough possessions or income for a person's needs; the condition of being extremely poor; a person or community that lacks the financial resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living; and where a household income is below 60% of the average.

The Joseph Rowntree Trust have illustrated poverty in the diagram below:

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### Levels of poverty



There are 3 levels of poverty

### Poverty in East Devon

Accepting that there are several different definitions of poverty. The most common is relative income poverty, where households have less than 60% of contemporary median income (after benefits and taxes). We know that 60% of median household income (including earnings, pensions, investment income, benefits and taxes) in the UK was £17,759 in 2018/19. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's report found that once housing costs are included in this definition, fourteen million people (22%) are in poverty in the UK.

Office of National Statistics data shows that in financial year ending (FYE) 2020, the period leading up to the implementation of measures against the coronavirus (COVID-19), average household disposable income (after taxes and benefits) was £30,800 – up 2.3% (£700) compared with FYE 2019, after accounting for inflation.

Over FYE 2020, real earnings increased by an average of 1.5%, however more recently total annual pay growth for March to May 2020 fell by 1.3%, after accounting for inflation, which will likely impact adversely on income growth rates in FYE 2021. The increase in median income in FYE 2020 continues an upward trend seen since FYE 2013, where average household income increased by an average of 2.1% per year.

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Median gross weekly earnings £ East Devon - source DCC website

Indicator	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Male Full Time workers	570	559	564	623	575
Female Full Time Workers	420	452	450	465	529
Female Part Time Workers	206	195	200	213	
Male	529	514	476	563	499
Female	344	321	326	353	381
Total	414	395	393	426	423
Full Time Workers	519	513	496	550	554
Part Time Workers	207	193	191	213	196

### Median household incomes (including earnings, pensions, investment income, benefits and taxation)

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
UK median income	£28,783	£29,819	£30,674	£31,465	£30,918
60% of UK median income	£17,270	£17,891	£18,404	£18,879	£18,551

Source: ONS, 2020, Time series of mean and median equalised household disposable income

It is difficult to accurately measure the level of poverty in East Devon, as comparable data on household income is not available at a local, district level. The Council has access to income data from CACI, but this is only available in income bands of £5,000, and unlike the national data above, it does not factor in taxation. However, this does suggest that the proportion of households in East Devon with gross incomes below £20,000 per annum and £15,000 per annum has declined steadily between 2014/15 and 2019/20.

While a number of the indicators have improved, poverty remains a significant issue in East Devon. The income related indicators show that:

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- Average weekly earnings for the lowest 10% of earners were £xxx per week in 2019, which is xx times less than the average for all East Devon employees (£xxx per week).
- More than 1 in xx East Devon residents in 2019 lived in households claiming benefits. 13,968 people lived in households claiming Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support.

During this strategy period we will be developing a poverty indicator **dashboard** to provide visibility of poverty in the district. This will recognise the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and there being no single indicator.

### **The impact of coronavirus on poverty**

The national policy response to the coronavirus, including the short-term and longer-term impacts of lockdown on the local, national and global economy, is likely to lead to many more people in East Devon experiencing economic hardship. Many people in the district have already experienced a loss of income due to furloughing, redundancy or difficulty finding self-employed work.

It is likely that the lockdown will push some people into economic hardship who have previously been relatively well off. It will also exacerbate existing poverty for people on low incomes, with those who have no credit history or savings to fall back likely to be hit particularly hard. A combination of economic hardship and the social restrictions of lockdown have also led to an increase in mental health issues, loneliness and isolation.

During 2020 and subsequent years, it is likely that the economic and social effects of Covid-19 will continue to be felt in the district. If the recession continues, it is likely that unemployment will increase, incomes will drop for many residents, and the number of people claiming Universal Credit and other benefits will increase. People who were already on low incomes before lockdown are more likely to be impacted by the longer-term economic consequences of the pandemic.

As part of its Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Council will work with partner organisations and local communities to respond to both the initial and longer-term impacts of coronavirus on residents and local communities.

### **East Devon District Council's response to poverty to date**

The Council is committed to tackling poverty in the district. For some years the Council has produced policies, which aim to:

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- improve the standard of living and daily lives of residents in East Devon who are experiencing poverty; and
- help alleviate issues that can lead households on low incomes to experience financial pressures.

The Council has stated that it wants to ensure that:

- Nobody should get into poverty without immediate help from EDDC
- Nobody should be in involuntary poverty longer than 2 years in East Devon

This will be achieved through collaborative working and effective relationships with partners.

### **Evolving our approach - our strategy for tackling poverty**

The Council's approach set out in this strategy reflects updated evidence on the nature of poverty in East Devon and changes in the national context over the past ten years.

This learning includes:

1. The importance of balancing efforts to address the immediate effects of poverty, with preventative work to address the root causes of poverty.
2. Being clear on which issues can be addressed by direct delivery by Council services, which issues can be achieved through partnership working (where more can be achieved through collaboration) and which issues require influencing and lobbying activity (where powers lie with Government or other agencies).
3. A need to build the capacity and resilience of residents and communities.

These three lessons inform the three underpinning themes in this strategy which are outlined below.

This Strategy has been shaped and encouraged through the work of the Council's **Poverty Working Panel** established to gather evidence on poverty and develop a plan to alleviate poverty in the district.

### **Three underpinning themes**

#### **1. Addressing the causes and effects of poverty**

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation identifies a number of different causes of poverty. Some of these causes can also be consequences, creating a cycle that can trap people in poverty. The causes are summarised in the table below.

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Cause	Explanation
<b>Unemployment and low-paid jobs lacking prospects and security</b>	Low pay leads to low income and inadequate savings or pensions. Indebtedness adds to the adverse financial situation for many households. Redundancy amongst older people can also be a factor in poverty.
<b>Low levels of skills or education</b>	Low levels of skills or education make it difficult to secure a job, with security, prospects and decent pay.
<b>An ineffective benefit system</b>	A range of issues with the current benefits system, including insufficient levels of benefits to meet high costs; difficulties in moving into work or increasing hours; difficulties in engaging with the benefits system and delays; and low up-take of some benefits.
<b>High costs of housing and goods and services</b>	High living costs can help create poverty, including high costs for housing, goods and services, and higher costs due to increased need (e.g. personal care for disabled people). There can also be a 'poverty premium', where people in poverty pay more for the same goods and services.
<b>Discrimination</b>	Discrimination can limit people's access to good qualifications or jobs and can restrict access to services
<b>Weak family relationships</b>	Family breakdown can lead to poverty and lack of supportive parenting can impact on a child's education and development. Domestic abuse can also have poverty implications.
<b>Chaotic lives and traumatic life events</b>	Chaotic lifestyles Including problematic use of drugs and alcohol. Poverty can also occur with sudden onset of illness, disability or other life changing events.
<b>Abuse or trauma</b>	Neglect or abuse as a child, or trauma in adult life, can have negative impacts on a person's mental health, which can contribute to poverty.

The JRF also identifies a number of key effects of poverty, some of which are similar to some of the causes of poverty listed above:

- housing problems
- homelessness
- being a victim or perpetrator of crime
- health problems - including mental and physical health
- drug or alcohol problems

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- teenage parenthood
- relationship and family problems
- lower educational achievement
- poverty itself – poverty in childhood increases the risk of poverty in adulthood

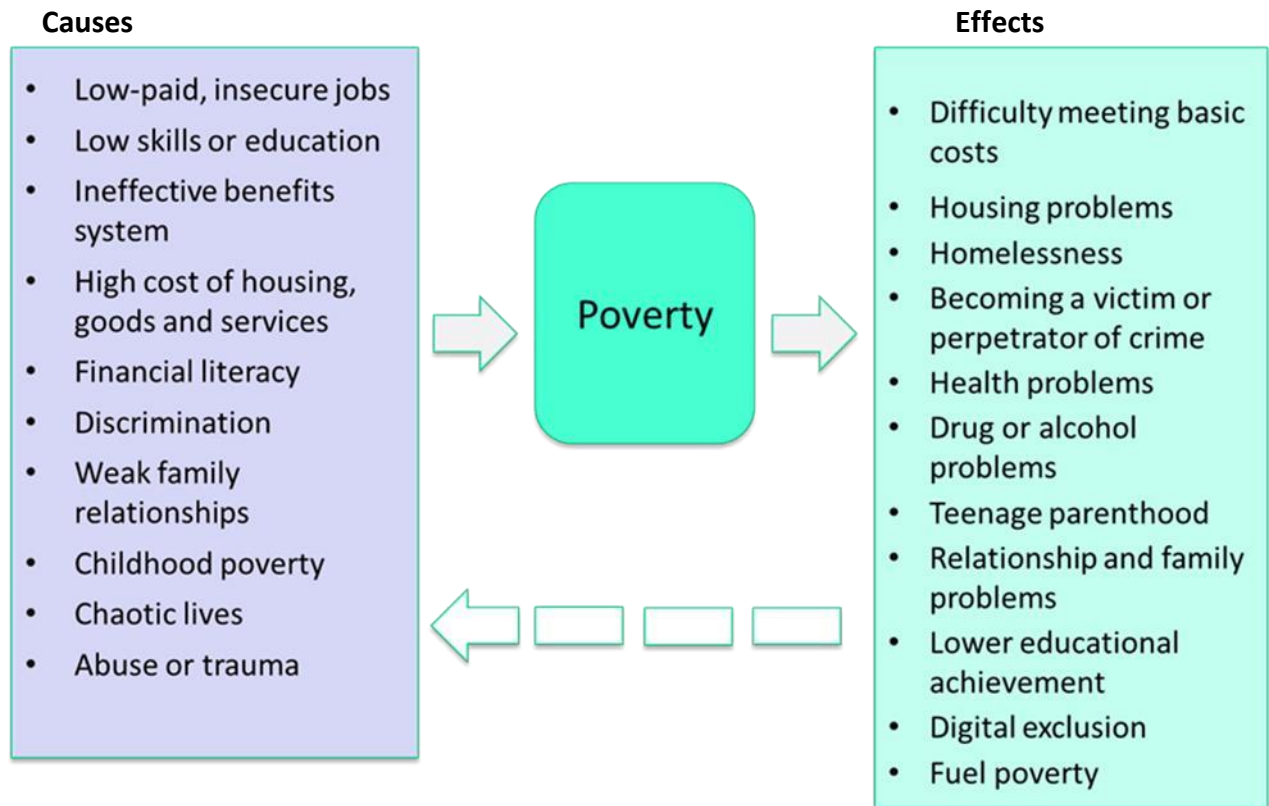
The Poverty Working Panel considered that discussions with key stakeholders and residents combined with local knowledge confirmed that many of the issues identified by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation impact on residents in poverty in East Devon. In addition to these issues, residents and consultees identified the issues summarised in the table below:

Issue	Explanation
<b>Difficulty meeting basic needs</b>	People in poverty can struggle to meet basic needs including food, fuel costs, furniture and appliances, and shelter.
<b>Digital exclusion</b>	People on low incomes are less likely to be able to afford internet access, which can make it difficult to apply for Universal credit and other benefits, access cheaper utility deals, apply for jobs and access public services. Rural isolation can also be a factor in poverty.
<b>Financial literacy</b>	Including understanding of how to manage finances and debt.
<b>Fuel poverty</b>	People in poverty can experience fuel poverty, resulting from rising energy costs and poor home energy efficiency.
<b>Impacts of welfare reforms</b>	Including the progressive roll-out of Universal Credit, the Benefits Cap, and the Spare Room Subsidy or 'Bedroom Tax'

The causes and effects of poverty identified by the JRF and local stakeholders and consultees are summarised in the diagram below.

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**Figure 2 – The causes and effects of poverty**



This strategy seeks to balance our ongoing efforts to address the effects of poverty, with a further focus on preventative work (often in partnership with other agencies and organisations) to address some of the root causes of poverty outlined above.

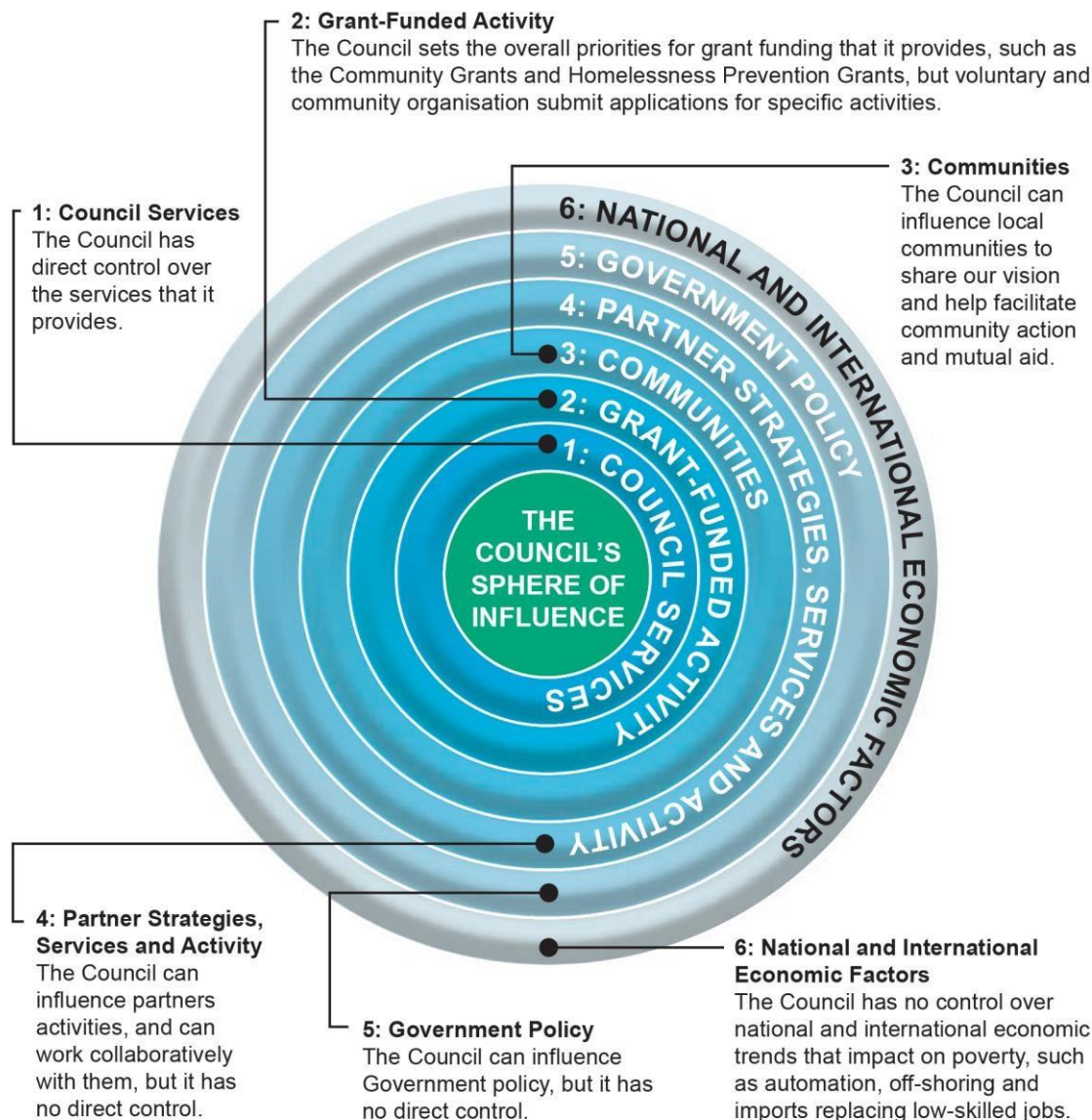
### **2. Balancing direct delivery, partnership-working and influencing activity**

A range of different organisations and factors have an impact on poverty in East Devon. As shown in the diagram below, the Council has varying levels of control and influence on these different organisations and factors, from Council service delivery, where the Council has direct control, through to national and international economic factors, where the Council has no control or influence.



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Figure 3 – The Council’s Sphere of Influence in relation to poverty



The Council’s Anti-Poverty Strategy focuses primarily on actions that the Council can deliver directly, together with some actions that are delivered in partnership with public, voluntary and community partners. Our approach will seek to be clear on:

- which issues can be addressed by direct delivery by Council services;
- which issues can be achieved through partnership working (where more can be achieved through collaboration); and
- which issues require influencing and lobbying activity (where powers lie with Government or other agencies) to bring about change and secure funding.

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The Action Plan that accompanies this strategy clearly highlights which actions will be achieved through direct service delivery, partnership working or influencing and lobbying.

Through its mainstream services the Council is well placed to take action to address some of the causes and effects of poverty identified above. For example, through provision of Council housing, housing advice services, and funding for homelessness support services, the Council can help to address housing affordability issues, housing problems and homelessness. The Council also provides and commissions a range of services that help promote public health and active lifestyles, and provides access to green spaces across East Devon.

However, as shown in the table below, there are many other issues where, while the Council provides some relevant service or grant funding, other local partners in the public, private or voluntary sector have greater responsibilities and capabilities to make a difference. Through this strategy, the Council will continue to seek opportunities to work effectively in partnership with these organisations.

Issue	Lead agency or agencies
<b>Benefits system</b>	JobCentre Plus (for Universal Credit)
<b>Crime</b>	Police, Probation Service
<b>Mental and physical health problems</b>	NHS, Devon County Council, Devon Partnership Trust
<b>Discrimination</b>	Voluntary and community groups focused on equalities issues
<b>Family relationships, abuse and trauma</b>	Devon County Council Social Services, voluntary and community groups

There are aspects of poverty where the Government or other organisations have greatest influence and the Council currently has little or no service delivery responsibilities or regulatory powers. On these issues, the Council will seek to show 'leadership' and lobby for changes in Government policy and funding to address immediate financial needs and bring about long-term, lasting changes to the underlying causes of poverty. Some of these issues are shown in the table below.

Issue	Lead agency or agencies
<b>National policy on the benefits system</b>	Government policy on welfare benefits
<b>Unemployment, pay and job security</b>	Government fiscal and labour market policy, local employers, JobCentre Plus

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### Skills and education

Government education and skills policy, schools, further education colleges, Universities

### 3. Building the capacity of residents and communities, and facilitating community action and mutual support

The Council's approach to tackling poverty will also focus on building the capacity of local residents and communities. The Council intends to work collaboratively with local residents, community groups and voluntary groups to build their capacity and help them to become more self-sustaining.

We will listen to residents' views on local issues and work with communities to identify the solutions. As a Council, we will seek to coordinate and facilitate community action and mutual aid to help address poverty, focusing on the strengths and assets that communities bring to the table.

The outstanding community response to the Coronavirus emergency shows the desire East Devon residents and communities have to support each other, and particularly the most vulnerable. The emergence of a network of mutual aid groups potentially provides one route for developing this aspect of East Devon life, and the Council will continue to facilitate and build such community-led approaches in the period where the district begins to recover from the pandemic.

### Our five strategic objectives

The three themes set out above are woven through five strategic objectives with lead Services identified:

- 1 Helping people on low incomes to maximise their household income and minimise their costs, building financial resilience and reducing indebtedness. Lead Service – Finance.
- 2 Strengthening families and communities, including supporting groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty, and community and voluntary groups working to combat poverty. Lead Service – Housing.
- 3 Promoting an inclusive economy, by raising skills and improving access to a range of employment opportunities for people on low incomes. Lead Service – Growth, Development & Prosperity.
- 4 Addressing the high cost of housing, improving housing conditions, creating affordable warmth and reducing homelessness. Lead Service – Housing.

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- 5 Improving health outcomes for people on low incomes, including access to good diet, health care and ill health prevention. Lead Service – Environmental Health.

The rationale for each objective, and the key activities we will undertake to help achieve each, is set out below and in the Action Plan. For each objective, we set out how the activity fits within our underpinning theme of balancing actions which are within the council's direct delivery; which will be developed and delivered in partnership; and which we will lobby Government and others to deliver.

### **Objective 1 - Helping people on low incomes to maximise their income and minimise their costs, building financial resilience, and reducing indebtedness.**

While East Devon as a whole is very prosperous and average wages are comparatively high, a significant proportion of residents are receiving low levels of pay and/or are claiming benefits:

- One in xx people receive weekly pay (£xxx) which is less than xx% of the average weekly pay (£xxx) in the district.
- More than 1 in xx people live in households claiming Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax support.

High costs of living make it difficult for people on low incomes to meet basic costs. The JRF highlights that while globalisation, competition and innovation have pushed down the prices for many consumer goods and services, boosting living standards overall, rises in housing, transport, food and fuel prices have increased the cost of living, particularly for people in poverty. JRF research shows that nationally in 2018 families needed 30% more disposable income to meet basic costs than in 2008.

The cost of living is particularly high in East Devon, making it difficult for people on low incomes in the city to meet basic costs. Evidence shows that:

- Housing costs are high in East Devon. In 2019, the average lower quartile monthly rent was £xxx, while lower quartile average house prices were xxx times the average lower quartile earnings.
- Food poverty is an issue in East Devon, with the numbers of people receiving emergency food from Foodbanks steadily increasing from xxx in 2015 to xxx in 2020.
- Fuel poverty affects xx% of people in East Devon in 2019, due to a combination of low incomes, high energy costs and poor energy efficiency of some properties.

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The high cost of living can be exacerbated by “poverty premiums” where people in poverty pay more for the same goods and services. For example, many people on low incomes use pre-payment meters for gas and electricity, at greater cost. Similarly, people on low incomes are less likely to have internet access, and are therefore less likely to switch their energy supplier to get a better deal or access other cheaper online deals.

Income poverty has a very real impact on people’s lives, putting them under constant pressure. The JRF highlights the following effects of poverty:

“Poverty means not being able to heat your home, pay your rent, or buy the essentials for your children. It means waking up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty, and impossible decisions about money. It means facing marginalisation – and even discrimination – because of your financial circumstances. The constant stress it causes can overwhelm people, affecting them emotionally and depriving them of the chance to play a full part in society.”

### **Action to date**

To help address income poverty in East Devon the Council has taken a range of actions to date as part of its Anti-Poverty Strategy. To increase incomes for people in low-paid employment, we have:

- run a campaign to encourage local employers to become accredited with the Living Wage Foundation and pay all their staff the Real Living Wage.
- supported benefit claimants to receive their full entitlement of Housing Benefit and Council Tax reduction.
- Run a loan shark awareness campaigns.

We have also taken a delivered a range of actions to help reduce costs for low income residents, including:

- Funding voluntary and community groups to provide a range of activities to help reduce social or economic inequality through the Council’s annual Community Grants programme. This has included funding Citizen’s Advice to provide free legal, debt and money advice, financial capability support, and specialist welfare rights casework.
- Providing a dedicated Community Support Hub in addition to the Council’s Customer Service Centre (CSC), where residents can access debt, financial and rent advice from Council officers and voluntary and community groups.

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- Training Rental Officers and funding HomeMaker to support Council tenants and other low income residents in financial crisis to access financial support, benefits and budgeting and debt advice.
- Nominating an Environmental Health Officer to advise on Fuel and to assist low income residents to reduce their fuel and water costs by installing energy or water saving measures in their homes.
- Supporting volunteer digital champions to deliver a programme of digital inclusion sessions for older people in sheltered housing.

We have also carried out a significant amount of work in partnership with other local organisations to address food poverty in East Devon. This has included:

- Providing funding for local Food Banks in our towns.
- Funding HALFF to provide a programme of cookery sessions in areas of deprivation over 3 years, helping participants to prepare healthy, low cost meals.
- Assisted with food deliveries.
- Promoted access to food banks on our website.

### **Actions for 2021- onwards**

To help address income poverty in East Devon, the Council will progress a range of actions from 2021 onwards to help people on low incomes to maximise their income and minimise their costs. These actions are set out in detail in the action plan that accompanies this strategy. The key actions include:

#### *District Council actions*

- Supporting Housing Benefit and Council Tax support claimants to receive their full entitlement.
- Supporting low income residents to access financial support, and providing advice on benefits, budgeting and debt issues.
- Providing an advice in the Council's Customer Service Centre to provide space for organisations offering debt, benefits and financial advice to low income residents.
- Supporting digital inclusion sessions for Council tenants and leaseholders, and older residents in sheltered housing schemes and more widely.
- Promoting the Real Living Wage, and ensuring that our contractors and partner do the same.

#### *Partnership actions*

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- Working with partner organisations and local communities to develop measures to support residents experiencing economic hardship and poverty as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.
- Working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, local housing providers and the voluntary sector to support vulnerable benefit claimants in the transition to Universal Credit following the full roll-out to all claimants in East Devon.
- Provide funding to voluntary and community groups through the Council's Community Grants for activity focussed on reducing social or economic inequality, including funding for debt advice services and other activities that will help reduce poverty.
- Work in partnership with local voluntary and community groups to address food poverty, including working with Food Banks to develop a food re-distribution hub.
- Work with partner agencies and community groups to develop sustainable networks to support residents in fuel or water poverty to reduce their energy and water costs.
- Support partner organisations and community groups to develop sustainable activities to support low income residents to access the internet and develop digital skills.
- Promote credit unions and the dangers of using loan sharks.

### *Influencing and lobbying actions*

- Promote Living Wage accreditation to employers in East Devon, including businesses, public bodies and voluntary and community sector organisations.
- Work with local businesses to identify ways in which they might use their skills, capacity and resources to support achievement of shared objectives around tackling poverty and disadvantage.
- Lobbying and influencing Government on welfare benefits policy issues.

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### **Objective 2 - Strengthening families and communities, including supporting groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty**

While many areas of East Devon are comparatively affluent, there continues to be concentrations of poverty and deprivation in particular communities in the district.

According to the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), xx of East Devon's Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) were in the most deprived 20% of LSOAs in the country in 2019. Each LSOA represents an area with a population of around 1500 people. The two most deprived LSOAs are in **Littleham** and **St. Pauls** ward.

The concentrations of poverty and deprivation in particular localities suggests that there is a need for collaborative area-based work in the most deprived neighbourhoods and communities in the district to identify and address the underlying issues that lead to persistent deprivation. Through this Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Council will work with partner organisations to develop area based approaches, building on the County Council's approach, and other multi-agency initiatives.

As well as supporting geographical communities where there are higher levels of poverty and discrimination, key local stakeholders have suggested that there is a need to support particular communities or groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty. Available national and local data shows that older people, children, disabled people, BAME people, LGBT people and women are more likely to experience poverty.

#### **Actions for 2021- onwards**

The key actions the Council will take from 2021 onwards to strengthen families and communities are set out in detail in the action plan that accompanies this strategy. They include:

##### *District Council actions*

- Reviewing the needs of the community and voluntary sector in building stronger communities, and identify where the Council can best provide support.
- Supporting and promoting volunteering, including holding events to increase the number of people volunteering for local community and voluntary groups.
- Funding and supporting events which increase community pride and cohesion.
- Providing a programme of 'community days' in low income areas.



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- Using planning policy to ensure that new developments promote permeability, connectivity and accessibility.
- Ensure that the Council's community development and environmental programme includes schemes in more deprived wards in the district.
- Highlight the issue of rural isolation and poverty.

### *Partnership actions*

- Develop a collaborative, area-based approach to support communities with high levels of deprivation in partnership with a range of organisations.
- Support an annual programme of events which celebrate diversity and promote community cohesion, in partnership with local equality and diversity organisations.

### *Influencing and lobbying actions*

- Greater recognition of the need for building resilience and to support households get back on their feet.
- Funding local authorities to undertake this work and greater recognition of the benefits by central government.

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

As outlined above, while East Devon is very prosperous overall, there are significant levels of inequality in the city and a proportion of residents are on low incomes or in poverty. As part of the Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Council will seek to promote a more inclusive economy, where all residents can benefit from East Devon's prosperity. The OECD defines inclusive growth as: "economic growth that creates opportunity for all segments of the population and distributes the dividends of increased prosperity, both in monetary and non-monetary terms, fairly across society."

One of the key causes of poverty and inequality is differences in education, skills and employment levels. Evidence suggests that in East Devon there is:

- an **educational attainment gap** in East Devon, which impacts on longer term life chances for young people from low income households.
- a **skills gap** in East Devon. xxx% of the working age population in East Devon had higher level qualifications (NVQ Level 4 and above) in 2019.
- a low level of **social mobility**, possibly as a result of these education, skills and employment issues.

### **Actions for 2021- onwards**

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The key actions the Council will take from 2021 onwards to promote an inclusive economy are set out in detail in the action plan that accompanies this strategy. They include:

### *District Council actions*

The Council will seek to use its planning powers to help create a more inclusive economy. One of the themes identified in the East Devon Local Plan is: Wellbeing and social inclusion – how the plan can help spread the benefits of growth, helping to create healthy and inclusive communities. As the plan is developed consideration is being given to how this theme can be integrated throughout, drawing on relevant evidence.

There are also opportunities to promote inclusive growth through major new developments, such as Cranbrook. Specific policies will be firmed up as the development progresses, but should include a requirement for developers to submit an employment and skills plan with planning proposals, setting out how they will seek to employ a skilled local workforce and provide training and apprenticeships throughout the delivery of the development.

### *Partnership actions*

We will work with local businesses to identify ways in which they might use their skills, capacity and resources to help tackle poverty and disadvantage. This could include businesses making financial contributions, engaging with local schools or providing skilled volunteers to support local voluntary and community groups taking action to reduce poverty.

We will also work in partnership with those organisations which have greater responsibility for education, skills and employment issues, including Devon County Council, JobCentre Plus, schools, further education colleges, the University of Exeter.

### *Influencing and lobbying actions*

As identified above, there are a number national and international economic factors that affect the shape of the local economy, which it is difficult for a local authority to influence. We will take opportunities to lobby Government on relevant economic policy issues, and seek to influence the strategic approach of the Local Enterprise Partnership.

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### **Objective 4 - Addressing the high cost of housing, improving housing conditions, and reducing homelessness**

As highlighted above, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) identifies high housing costs as a key cause of poverty and housing problems and homelessness as potential effects of poverty. We recognise this locally as a factor influencing poverty levels.

This strategy does not seek to replace the East Devon Housing Strategy and related plans, which sets out the Council's approach to broader housing issues. Instead this section, highlights some of the housing issues facing people in poverty in East Devon, and some of the actions that are being taken to address these issues.

#### **Addressing the high cost of housing**

The JRF states that: "The high cost of housing and childcare in many parts of the UK creates the biggest squeeze on people in poverty.... Increasing the supply of genuinely affordable housing to bring down costs across tenures has become central to solving poverty in much of the UK."

While strong economic growth in East Devon has brought investment into the area and created employment, it has also led to an in-migration of highly skilled workers and high demand for houses, leading to high housing costs.

Housing is particularly unaffordable for people on lower incomes in East Devon. For many people on low incomes in the city, owning their own home is unachievable. Renting accommodation in the private sector has also become less affordable for lower income households, with lower quartile monthly private rents in the district increasing significantly typically xxx per week in 2019.

Renting privately is particularly difficult for people who are claiming benefits. There has been a significant gap between Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates (which determine the level of Housing Benefit entitlements for private rented housing and the housing element of Universal Credit) in East Devon and private rents in the district. This is because the Local Housing Allowance rate is based on a Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA) which includes places where rents are much lower than in East Devon.

This gap has reduced as a result of special measures introduced during the coronavirus pandemic, but we will continue to lobby government to seek alignment of the BRMA with actual rents in the city on a permanent basis.

#### **Actions for 2021-onwards**

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Part of the solution to high housing costs is to increase the supply of housing, particularly affordable housing, to meet the high levels of demand in East Devon. The majority of new affordable homes will come from private developments. The Council has set requirements in the current Local Plan for the proportion of affordable homes that must be delivered as part of new developments, including a requirement for 40% of homes on sites of 10 or more dwellings to be affordable (of which 75% should be social housing). In 2019/20 a total of 356 new affordable homes were delivered, and it is anticipated that more will be delivered through future developments.

The Council owns and manages over 4,200 homes in East Devon and we are committed to building new council homes which are affordable to those on low incomes. The Council has an ambitious programme to deliver at least 100 new council homes over 5 years subject to funding being available.

### **Improving housing conditions**

While delivering new affordable housing is a priority in East Devon, the majority of residents will continue to live in currently existing homes, some of which are in poor condition. Due to a combination of low incomes, high energy costs and poor energy efficiency of homes, many low income residents struggle to pay their utility bills. In 2019 xxx% of households in East Devon were in fuel poverty.

### **Actions for 2021-onwards**

The Council has made significant investments in maintaining our homes to a good standard and making them more energy efficient. The Council will invest a further £5 million from 2020-2023 in improving the energy efficiency of Council-owned homes with the lowest energy efficiency ratings. We will also identify opportunities to reduce energy consumption as part of the development of new Council affordable housing schemes.

The Council will also support residents on low incomes by:

- Supporting private tenants in their homes, taking enforcement action against landlords / property managers whose properties do not meet the required energy efficiency standards.
- Ensuring Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) are licensed where required and proactively take enforcement against landlords or property managers that are not complying.
- Working with partner agencies and community groups to develop sustainable networks to support residents in fuel or water poverty to reduce their energy and water costs.

## East Devon District Council Anti-Poverty Strategy

### Reducing Homelessness

The number of homeless people, and those threatened with homelessness, approaching the Council for assistance has significantly increased over the last five years. The Council's Homelessness Review identifies a number of key causes of homelessness:

- Homelessness due to a lack of appropriate accommodation.
- Breakdown of personal and family relationships. Our data shows that three of the four most common reasons for homelessness are: being asked to leave by family or friends; family breakdown; and domestic abuse.
- Financial difficulties. Loss of a private sector tenancy is the second highest reason for homelessness, with some people losing privately-rented tenancies because they are unable to meet rental costs due to debt, cuts in welfare funding and low Local Housing Allowance rates.

Particular groups of people are more at risk of becoming homeless, including single person households, people with mental health problems, and ex-offenders being discharged from prison.

As part of its mainstream work to address homelessness the Council:

- Provides a housing advice service, which provided advice to 600+ households in 2019/20 on a range of housing concerns including homelessness.
- Carries out work to prevent homelessness, or relieve homelessness where it cannot be prevented or has already occurred. xxx households were successfully prevented from homelessness or relieved from homelessness in 2019/20.
- Funds a network of prevention, relief and support activity delivered by partner organisations through a combination of contracts and £xxx annual grant funding.
- Secures private rented housing for single homeless people, the Council's Rent Deposit Scheme.

Preventing and tackling homelessness requires a co-ordinated and strategic response, and the Council works in partnership with a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies. The Council has a Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, which sets out in detail our plans to prevent and manage homelessness in the district.

### Rough-sleepers

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The numbers of rough sleepers in East Devon has fluctuated in recent years. The number of rough sleepers counted in the district during the course of a year increased from 3 in 2015/16 to 12 in 2019/20.

Rough-sleeping is a complex issue, and people find themselves sleeping rough as a result of a variety of personal factors. However, evidence from local counts of rough sleepers shows that people are much more likely to end up on the street if they have mental health problems or alcohol or substance misuse issues. Street homelessness also disproportionately affects men, people who have suffered trauma, people who have been in some kind of institutional care or organisation and people who have little by way of financial or social capital.

### Actions for 2021-2023

- **Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy** – A key focus of the proposed new strategy will be measures to increase access to private sector tenancies for homeless people. This will enable people to progress more quickly along the pathway from sleeping rough, to overnight shelters, to short-term hostel accommodation and into rented accommodation.
- **Promoting Housing Benefit Plus** – The gap between private rents and the Local Housing Allowance makes it difficult for homeless people to meet private rental costs. The Housing Benefit Plus scheme provides a supplement to Housing Benefit (1 year for single people up to £133pcm, 2 years for families up to £200pcm) to bridge the gap. This is accompanied by employment and income maximisation advice, which helps people to increase their incomes to the point where they are able to meet private rents on an ongoing basis.
- **Housing First** – the Council is piloting the Housing First approach to help people to come off the streets. Experience shows that hostel accommodation is not suitable for some rough sleepers with complex needs, who often end up sleeping rough again. Housing First involves providing a secure self-contained home, together with personalised support, for rough sleepers with multiple and complex needs. Providing a home first can provide a stable platform from which other issues can be addressed and can lead to better outcomes as a result.

### Objective 5 - Improving health outcomes for people on low incomes

The Council's Public Health Strategy observes that while health outcomes overall in East Devon are broadly very good, there are significant health inequalities in the district.

Overall East Devon has a low proportion of people with unhealthy weight, but as our strategy shows, a greater proportion of children have excess weight in the most

## East Devon District Council Anti-Poverty Strategy

deprived wards in the district. Obesity can increase the risk of health conditions such as diabetes, joint problems and heart disease.

The Public Health Strategy notes that there is a strong link between health outcomes and the following factors:

- Income levels.
- Levels of education, due to better employment prospects and incomes for people with higher qualifications, but also better 'health literacy' and adoption of healthier lifestyles.
- Lifestyle and health behaviours, including dietary factors, smoking, and lack of physical activity and are also important risk factors.
- Substance misuse (including alcohol and drug use).

The Doughnut Economic model has regard to equality and the basic needs of individuals and households. We are starting to use this to guide decision making and influencing the development of local strategies and policies.

### **Actions for 2021-2023**

#### *District Council actions*

The Council has a role to play in providing a range of preventative public health services that can have a positive impact on health outcomes for low income residents and communities. These range from supporting physical exercise through provision of leisure centres, promoting active lifestyles, and providing access to green spaces, to working with local voluntary groups and businesses to promote healthy eating and access to sustainable food.

The key actions the Council will take from 2021 onwards to help improve health outcomes for people are set out in more detail in the action plan that accompanies this strategy. They include:

- Providing a discount in entry prices at LED run sports and swimming facilities for people receiving benefits.
- Providing free swimming sessions for low income families with children, and free and discounted swimming sessions for young people.
- Using planning policy to help ensure new developments help create a good living environment which supports good mental and physical health outcomes, through provision of open space and the design of the built environment.
- Reduce obesity, promote healthy eating and healthy weight programmes.

#### *Partnership actions*

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The Council will also support delivery of a number of activities to improve health outcomes with local partners, including:

- Supporting free exercise referrals by GPs for low income residents in East Devon.
- Supporting cookery skills and healthy eating programmes for low income residents delivered by local voluntary and community organisations.
- Providing a programme of free lunches with churches and other partners for low income families during school holidays in areas of highest need in the district.
- Supporting outreach advice service for residents experiencing mental health issues due to low income, debt or addiction.

### *Influencing and lobbying actions*

While the Council provides a number of services which impact on public health, it is not the lead agency on public health, social care and clinical issues, so it will seek to collaborate with and influence a range of NHS bodies, Devon County Council and voluntary and community organisations to help improve health outcomes for people on low incomes. This can be achieved through several key partnership structures, including:

- Devon Health and Wellbeing Board, which includes representatives of NHS England, Clinical Commissioning Group, NHS providers, Healthwatch and local authorities.
- Primary Care Networks, which bring together GP practices in East Devon and are focusing on developing Integrated Neighbourhood models to address key health and social care issues in local communities.

### **Conclusions**

Poverty prevention and alleviation is a priority for the Council. We will use our powers and influence to improve the quality of life for our residents by implementing an ambitious strategy and action plan of measures to improve lives.

We will align our services towards poverty alleviation and ensure that our activities are coordinated, effective and have a positive impact.

We will measure and monitor our actions, refining our commitments as we learn and listen to the needs of our communities.

We have set ourselves a challenging ambitious agenda, but with determination and a consistent focus we are confident that we will succeed.



