



Report of Andy Palmer, Head of Transformation, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide the Health and Wellbeing Board with an overview of:
 - (a) the most recent welfare, economic and poverty indicators for the county; and
 - (b) the progress of the Council and partners' efforts to address and alleviate poverty including a summary of the actions to respond to the negative financial impacts experienced by residents as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the poverty action strategy and plan.
- 2 The situation with COVID-19 is changing rapidly and government announcements, policy and guidance change daily meaning some of the information in the report may have been superseded.

Executive summary

- 3 The County Council has a longstanding record in supporting social, economic and financial inclusion through the work of the Council's Poverty Action Steering Group (PASG).
- 4 Over recent years the PASG has focussed its efforts on mitigating the impacts, wherever possible, of the Government's austerity and welfare reform programmes and acknowledge that poverty is a major contributing factor to health and wellbeing.
- 5 The Council has developed a Poverty Action Plan (PAP) which was approved by Cabinet in September 2019, documenting efforts to support people in need.
- 6 Measures in the PAP include support for those on low incomes with access to holistic advice and guidance, access to the Council's Welfare

Assistance Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments, welfare rights and employment teams etc.

- 7 The Council's adopted approach to wellbeing, is well aligned with the community led approach to the delivery of the Poverty Action Strategy and Plan, and the work to support our children and families where we gain feedback from families and communities themselves, to ensure they feel they have been involved in making decisions that affect their lives. For example, our initiatives such as holiday activities with food, and initiatives to make the school day more affordable. This support was further enhanced in the October half term holiday with the Council offering a voucher of £15 per child for parents whose children are in receipt of Free School Meals (FSMs).
- 8 Those seeking employment have been supported through the Durhamworks programme and the Council's employability team, primarily through programmes supported by the European Social Fund and match funded by the Council.
- 9 Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, measures to shield clinically vulnerable residents combined with the national lockdown necessitated a re-emphasis of certain elements of the PAP with a new "plan on a page" introduced through the PASG in May 2020 to refocus efforts during the pandemic.
- 10 The Government introduced a number of temporary measures to support people and businesses through the lockdown and subsequent restrictions. Government measures included: food boxes for the clinically shielding; wage subsidies ('furlough') for employees whose place of work was shut down and subsequently restricted; support for self-employed people; temporary cessation of benefit conditionality; suspension of evictions for tenants; mortgage holidays; and partial reversal of cuts in Universal Credit. More recently the Government has announced national schemes to support employment such as the Kickstart and Job Entry Targeted Support (JETS) schemes.
- 11 The Council has introduced a number of initiatives and programmes through the PASG over the last six months to "wrap around" government schemes and provide a more comprehensive package of support for residents of County Durham, with a holistic care/person centred management - "no one left behind" ethos running through the programme of activities.
- 12 The Council provided direct support to vulnerable people through the County Durham Together Community Hub with a strong focus on intelligence led welfare and community-based provision. Measures included: additional resources and fast-tracked applications through

Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) to support food and essential supplies, direct emergency food provision; support to foodbanks; welfare and daily living expenses payments; council tax reduction and council tax hardship; a grant for return to school costs; online employability programmes; and online advice and guidance.

- 13 The Council's PASG represents the Council to input into the welfare and community aspect of the Local Resilience Forum to join up welfare with other recovery initiatives in the Council and to link with partner organisations.
- 14 The Council is developing a number of programmes to further progress the work of the PASG through the County Durham Together approach, including: a programme of sustainable low-cost food in disadvantaged areas; flexible employment support; improvements in advice and guidance on money matters; further support for parents during the holidays; and greater community resilience.

Recommendation(s)

- 15 The Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to note the progress being made by the Council and its partners in addressing welfare reform and the wider poverty issues in the county including the recent and ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

- 16 The financial pressures on lower-income households have increased considerably in recent years. A combination of depressed real wage growth, the Government's programme of welfare reforms, and longer-term challenges in the labour market are creating serious financial problems for our residents and poverty is a major contributing factor to health and wellbeing.
- 17 The Council co-ordinates its efforts to tackle poverty across council services through the Poverty Action Steering Group (PASG). This is a senior officer group, chaired by the Corporate Director of Resources and attended by the Portfolio Holder for Social Inclusion. We also work closely with our key partners to ensure that we share intelligence on emerging issues.
- 18 The Council has allocated significant resources to supporting welfare assistance for our residents along with a range of community projects in previous years. At its meeting on 12 February 2020, Durham County Council's Cabinet agreed a further £1.5m to support the poverty agenda and social inclusion in County Durham. Further resource was allocated to Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) at the start of the pandemic in March 2020 to support communities and in July 2020 £693,391 was allocated to the Council from DEFRA to support essential food and supplies.
- 19 On 8 November 2020 the Government announced that additional funding and support would be made available to local authorities to support vulnerable households during the winter period. The funding is being allocated by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), with a stated aim of giving vulnerable households peace of mind in the run up to Christmas and over the winter months during the pandemic by helping those who need it to have food on the table and other essentials, so every child will be warm and well-fed this winter. The Council have been allocated £1,872,512.86 which will be received in three tranches and the Council will be responsible for administering the scheme in County Durham.
- 20 The COVID-19 pandemic has had huge impacts on the UK labour market, and despite temporary changes to the existing welfare benefits and implementation of large new schemes, households face great uncertainty over the future, including in terms of the financial support available.
- 21 The UK is currently negotiating a trade deal with the EU. Depending on the outcome of the trade deal, it is possible that the county will experience wider detrimental impacts as manufacturing businesses

adjust whilst the economy is already experiencing a significant downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 22 Despite the funding constraints that we face, we remain committed to providing help and support for residents in financial difficulty as part of our vision for County Durham. It is important that the Council and its partners continue to respond through the comprehensive approach we now have to welfare reform and poverty issues, overseen by the council's PASG.

Impacts of Welfare Reform and COVID-19 on the County

- 23 The Council has monitored the impact of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 which has been documented in previous reports and this monitoring continues during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst it is not yet possible to accurately assess the immediate and ongoing impact of the pandemic; national research is starting to emerge.
- 24 A survey of more than 7,000 people, conducted by the Financial Conduct Authority¹ and published on 22 October 2020, found 12 million people in the UK had low financial resilience, meaning they may struggle with bills or loan repayments. The data shows 2 million of those who are not financially resilient have become so since February 2020. Due to the impact of the pandemic, many of those who have experienced changes in employment and increased stress are now likely to have low financial resilience. These consumers are more likely to fall behind on payments. 36% of respondents who already had low financial resilience, and had a mortgage, said they are likely to fall behind on mortgage payments; 36% of those with loans or credit cards are worried about repayments on these; and 42% of renters are worried about falling behind on rent payments.
- 25 This research has further identified that almost a third of adults (31%) have seen a decrease in income, with households seeing income fall by a quarter, on average. Those from a Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background were more likely to be affected, with 37% of BAME adults taking an income hit. Whilst survey results show that BAME adults are more likely to have reduced working hours, those aged between 25-34 are the most likely, by far, to have had a change in employment due to the pandemic. This will affect the take up of debt advice, with 19% of those aged 25-34 saying that they were more likely to seek debt advice in the next 6 months compared to 2% of those aged 55-64.

¹ <https://www.fca.org.uk/news/press-releases/fca-highlights-continued-support-consumers-struggling-payments>

- 26 The Joseph Rowntree Foundation² has examined options for the Government to support low income families and stimulate the economy during the pandemic, and has recently made the case for increases to social security payments. It notes that “social security is a ‘vital lifeline that keeps us afloat’ when support is needed as well as boosting consumer spending in targeted ways”. The report highlights that ending the temporary uplift of £20 per week to Universal Credit (UC) and Working Tax Credit will cause an ‘immediate and devastating loss of income for millions of families’ and outlines the need for the uplift to become permanent.
- 27 This is given weight by a publication from the Institute for Fiscal Studies³ that states ‘even with the temporary increases to UC, the UK has one of the least generous out-of-work benefits systems for workers on average earnings in the OECD’ (the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). It provides an example of ‘a single childless worker on average earnings who lost her job would now receive 17% of her usual income in benefits, compared with an average of 20% in the rest of the OECD. The difference is much larger (17% versus 55%) if contributory benefits (where the generosity of benefits is linked to work history) are included, since these are a much bigger feature of most other countries’ welfare systems’.
- 28 A report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission⁴ notes that equality and human rights are at risk of going backwards with clear and long-lasting damage to society and the economy as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The report outlines the impact of coronavirus across key areas of life and the hardship faced by people who already face disadvantage. In particular, it has identified concerning backwards trends both for young people and the care system. It has highlighted just how entrenched racial inequality is in society.
- 29 A report from the Child Poverty Action Group⁵ in August 2020 has noted that the pandemic has left low-income families struggling with a significant deterioration in living standards and high stress levels. The report, based on a survey of families with children who are eligible for free school meals, found around eight in 10 respondents reported being in a worse financial position than before the pandemic, and half were much worse off as their income had fallen and costs increased. Nearly nine in 10 respondents reported spending substantially more than

² <https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/keeping-20-lifeline-right-our-families-and-economy>

³ <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/15067>

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https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/equality_and_human_rights_commission_how_coronavirus_has_affected_equality_and_human_rights_2020.pdf

⁵ <https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/Poverty-in-the-pandemic.pdf>

before on food, electricity, and other essentials – usually because they have been at home much more. Many families also said that the cost of food had gone up significantly during the early part of lockdown.

- 30 Published on 10 September, the Local Government Association (LGA) report, 'A child-centred recovery'⁶, highlights that councils are preparing for a surge in demand for support for children and young people who have “disappeared” from view as a result of the pandemic. The LGA stated that councils are also bracing themselves for a rise in referrals for support that would have normally been made when children were being seen regularly by social workers and health workers. The LGA says the number of children in care has been rising each year and could increase further as a result of COVID-19. It is also warning that the impact of the virus may fall harder on disadvantaged children, who are likely to need even more support. Concerns are also raised over analysis indicating that young people may be worst affected by pandemic-related job losses, and about young people becoming more vulnerable and being drawn into youth violence and county lines drug activities, or being criminally exploited
- 31 The Children's Commissioner for England⁷ published a report in September 2020 on the impact of COVID-19 on children. The report highlights that that the impact has been widespread, profound and ongoing. The report states that children have faced a cocktail of secondary risks which means that many have suffered disproportionately as a result of the crisis. It is reported that children's needs have been frequently side-lined and ignored, most notably by the decision to open restaurants, non-essential shops and pubs before schools were fully re-opened. Vulnerable children (including children in care), children in custody and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities have also seen their rights actively downgraded resulting in 'a rising tide of childhood vulnerability'.
- 32 Due to data lags, it is not possible to accurately assess the immediate and ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic through the full range of statistics available nationally and on Durham Insights. However, the Council is monitoring the situation through its own data sources as well as ongoing community feedback to mobilise services and respond to need.
- 33 At the beginning of the pandemic there was a significant impact on the number of people claiming employment benefits; with currently nearly 10,000 more claimants age 16 to 64, compared to September 2019. Since this initial increase between March and May, the claimant count

⁶ <https://www.local.gov.uk/child-centred-recovery>

⁷ <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/cco-childhood-in-the-time-of-covid.pdf>

has remained relatively static and currently stands at 6.6%. This trend is reflected both nationally and regionally, with County Durham currently having the third lowest rate in the region. In September, there were 130 more claimants compared to August, of which 120 were young claimants (aged 16-24 years). Across the county, since March 2020, North Durham experienced the largest increase in claimants aged 16 to 64, and Sedgefield within the 18 to 24 population.

- 34 Youth unemployment has risen to almost 10% in County Durham in September and 11% in the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP) area. Nationally the rate was 9.5% in September 2020.
- 35 In terms of the Welfare Assistance Scheme, the daily living expenses element saw its greatest increase in relation to awards, at the start of the pandemic with weekly awards trebling in March 2020. Awards moved back to more 'normal' levels of around 50 per week in subsequent months. The latest data in October has shown figures starting to rise again. As expected, claims for settlement grants have reduced over the last 6 months compared to the same period last year.
- 36 The number of Council Tax Reduction claims showed a similar pattern to Daily Living Expenses claims having peaked significantly at the end of March 2020 with four times the normal levels. This number reduced over subsequent months with a subsequent rise seen more recently.

National Policy update – Welfare and COVID-19

- 37 The resources available to councils to help address the financial problems of low-income residents are severely constrained. The Government has made several announcements in relation to supporting local government financially, either by making available additional funding or by bringing forward previously announced funding programmes.
- 38 In response to the pandemic, there have been several government schemes and initiatives announced in relation to welfare, finance and economic support. These are detailed in Appendix 2 and the Council has had a role in direct implementation and enabling and supporting local action or advice and guidance which is detailed in the next section.

The council's response

- 39 The Council has taken a lead through a strategic and co-ordinated approach to the changes made to the welfare system and the impacts of poverty to date, including how the funding available from government has been used to support people affected by the changes.
- 40 This has identified the benefit of joining services across service groupings. In doing so, it has become apparent that alongside the

welfare reform changes there are areas of work already being delivered which are complementary and collectively address the underlying issues of poverty around the county, and these include initiatives to improve the health of our residents.

- 41 The Council's PASG co-ordinates the delivery of a range of new and existing policy work which seeks to achieve a much broader understanding of the issues affecting residents, resulting from continuing changes to welfare and other issues which mean that residents can experience poverty. Building on this understanding, the group seek to identify actions to support residents and help address identified inequalities and improve overall health and wellbeing.
- 42 There is a comprehensive network of statutory, voluntary and community organisations who work together to provide advice services across the county through the Advice in County Durham Partnership (AiCDP). This is underpinned by comprehensive communications programme to ensure that claimants understand changes and are signposted to the most appropriate sources of advice, help and support, and council employees, particularly those in customer-facing roles, receive regular information and training to help them understand the changes to welfare and poverty issues and how the council and partners can help.
- 43 The Council has recently supported the AiCDP to procure a new referral portal and website, which will improve the referral process for advice and embed the "no wrong door" principle for residents, ensuring that any individual needing advice and support will be signposted to the most appropriate organisation. The portal is expected to launch in the new year.
- 44 The PASG is also currently acting as the Welfare and Community Cell of the Local Resilience Forum.

Poverty Action Strategy and Plan

- 45 The Council's poverty action plan was reviewed in 2019 and a new Poverty Action Strategy and Plan was approved by Cabinet in September 2019.
- 46 Clearly, many of the drivers of poverty - such as the strength of the economy, employment, wage rates, national welfare provision and inflation - are beyond the council's control. We have developed a poverty action strategy to help us mitigate the effects and make some of the impacts less severe, where possible. The strategy aims to provide focus and direction on the priorities for improving services and opportunities for residents in County Durham who are experiencing poverty and will cover a two-year period up to 2021.

- 47 Our ambition is to do more than passively support residents to claim benefits and pay their rent. We want to improve our evidence and analysis to create a one Council approach to support residents and mitigate the impacts of welfare reforms and poverty. We aspire to develop a compassionate coherent culture that seeks to maximise the value of our collective resources and appreciates the obstacles that internal and external silos create to supporting vulnerable residents.
- 48 Our vision is to *“improve the standard of living and daily lives of those residents in County Durham who are currently experiencing poverty; and to help alleviate issues that can lead households on low incomes to experience poverty”*. To achieve the best possible outcomes for residents experiencing poverty, our strategic aims are:
- (a) to improve our understanding of the types of poverty and its impacts on County Durham residents;
 - (b) to increase employability, personal wellbeing and sense of worth for residents;
 - (c) that residents receive the best support and advice available concerning their financial situation; and
 - (d) that children, young people and families have the resources to their basic needs including accessing opportunities to take part in society.
- 49 The strategy is underpinned by a revised Poverty Action Plan which focuses on new actions and commitments which will enable us to deliver the key priorities we have identified as being most important for reducing poverty levels in County Durham and achieving our vision.

Poverty Action Strategy and Plan – COVID-19

- 50 As the COVID-19 pandemic evolved, and residents and communities were ‘locked down’ we started to see an inevitable shift in the issues reported to the Council and partner agencies, particularly around family finance. This, no doubt, is set to accelerate as the economy contracts and people find themselves, without an income, many for the first time.
- 51 Our vision changed to *“to improve the standard of living and daily lives of those residents in County Durham who are currently experiencing immediate financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associate economic shocks; and to help alleviate long term issues that can lead households on low incomes to experience financial pressures and poverty”* and the Poverty Action Strategy and plan was therefore reformulated to reflect this and to formulate new initiatives to help tackle the crisis. This involved a rapid refresh of the action plan to include

some new short-to-medium term initiatives and investments and also identify where we could bring forward/replace existing actions, with those needed to address the impacts of the pandemic.

- 52 A plan on page has been developed to capture the emerging actions required to help our resident's financial circumstances during the pandemic and these are themed under four new workstreams which are working with key partners and stakeholders to take this work forward:
- (a) Community resilience;
 - (b) Employment and personal sense of worth;
 - (c) Welfare and money matters; and
 - (d) Children and families.
- 53 A consistent approach has been adopted within the four themes to ensure we enhance the holistic care/person centred management – no wrong door approach within all the actions delivered and the wellbeing of the county's residents is considered in every decision that is made and every action delivered. Regular feedback and engagement from those residents impacted and the partners helping us to deliver actions is a key element within this action plan.
- 54 The revised strategy, plan on a page, and action plan is attached at Appendix 3.

Key Actions - Poverty Action Strategy and Plan

- 55 Relevant services, projects and initiatives from the action plan continue to be monitored and reported via the appropriate service reporting channels and also regular updates are presented to the PASG. Recent achievements include:
- (a) Community resilience
 - (i) AAP welfare/poverty funded projects – 12 projects were delivered during 2019/20 reflecting the diverse needs of the county's residents with £120,000 funding allocated and £3,2919 match funding.
 - (ii) AAP funded COVID-19 support projects - over 150 projects and community organisations were funded to support vulnerable people access food and essential supplies as well as to help addressing loneliness; financial support and ongoing running costs to maintain community based services.

- (iii) Foodbanks - £50,000 annual grant to the Durham Foodbank to fund core county wide infrastructure and £5,400 to East Durham Trust Foodbank.
 - (iv) The Council established the County Durham Together Community Hub (the Hub) at the start of the pandemic to respond proactively and offer additional support to the 'shielded' population and to those 70,000 people who the Council identified as potentially vulnerable through previous service requests and data from other agencies. The Hub also provided a seven day week helpline to provide holistic person-centred support those in need. The Hub assessed individual need, promoted information of local community-based provision, direct support through a network of redeployed staff and links into Welfare Assistance, Emergency Food Provision, Welfare for Life, Check and Chat services and developed a data base of volunteers. County Durham Together is providing a COVID information line as well as providing welfare and advice services.
- (b) Employment and personal sense of worth
- (i) Employability Durham – 2,518 referrals since July 2018, to help residents accessing support to help them overcome barriers and move back into employment, education or training. During the pandemic, services have gone online or via telephone contact.
 - (ii) Durham Advance - since September 2018 over 820 participants have engaged/still engaging with the scheme and over 240 participants have moved into employment.
 - (iii) LINKCD - since July 2019 over 174 participants have engaged/still engaging with the scheme and over 115 participants have moved into employment.
 - (iv) North Durham Assist – between October 2018 and July 2020, over 170 residents have been referred onto this scheme and over 95 moved into employment.
 - (v) Employability Mentoring - between October 2018 and July 2020, 210 residents have been referred onto this scheme and 88 moved into employment.
 - (vi) The Council has supported youth employment through the Durham Works programme which has been operating since 2015 and has helped over 3800 young people into work or training.

- (c) Welfare and money matters
 - (i) Emergency food – in addition to the extra £1.4m the Council made available to community organisations to provide essential food and supplies, as at 4 October we have also provided 2,607 emergency food parcels to residents experiencing financial hardship whilst accessing food and emergency supplies.
 - (ii) Discretionary Housing Payments – for the year 2020/21 we have so far made over 2,200 DHP awards totalling £840k to help residents with rental costs.
 - (iii) Daily Living Expenses – for the year 2020/21 we have so far paid out £96k in DLE awards and £238k in Welfare Assistance payments to help residents with living expenses.
 - (iv) The Council has paid over £3.3m in Council Tax Relief to residents facing financial hardship.
 - (v) Durham Savers - 60 salary savings schemes for local residents working in local business have been set up with the credit unions and the scheme has delivered virtually in businesses and the community with 110 residents engaging in September-October 2020.
- (d) Children and families
 - (i) Cutting the Cost of the School Day - 106 schools/nurseries have undertaken the training programme.
 - (ii) Supporting families to access financial support - Universal Credit and smarter budgeting training delivered for CYPS social workers and One Point service practitioners. All One Point service practitioners have been trained and registered to use the Advice in County Durham Partnership Portal which has resulted in 131 referrals via the portal to date.
 - (iii) Back to School Support Fund – as at 9 October, 25 applications have been made with approximately £18,100.50 funding allocated directly to schools. These include 18 primary, 6 secondary and 1 special school.
 - (iv) Holiday Activities with Food - 30 projects delivered during the Easter holidays; 22 projects during May half term; and 85 projects during the six week summer holiday. This provision was extended to the October half term holiday period to

ensure that children in County Durham have access to stimulating activities and food during school holidays when FSM are not available.

- (v) One Point/Family Centre Family Activities - 1,148 distributed to children and families over the six week summer holiday period.

- 56 The Council allocated additional resources to offer a £15 voucher, per child, to all parents of children in receipt of FSM over the October half term holiday. The voucher worked through a QR code system and an online application process. This initiative was in addition to the money allocated to schools and community groups through AAPs to support holiday activities with food provision. Businesses and community groups responded with great generosity of spirit to the plight of children in receipt of FSM over the holiday period and so the Council publicised as much information as possible to advise parents of all local food provision in their locality.
- 57 The Council has a longstanding record of providing assistance to families during the school holidays and will continue to do so whilst families and children remain in need.

MTFP Growth and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs funding

- 58 The Council has already allocated significant funds to support the Poverty Action Plan since 2013. This has included, but is not exclusive to: over £900,000 additional funding to top up the council's Discretionary Housing Payments policy; £6,405,546 funding for benefits take up and advice initiatives; £840,000 funding to AAPs for welfare/poverty projects initiatives to help mitigate welfare/poverty type issues in communities; £2,519,930 for employability and housing initiatives; and £313,777 funding for food initiatives including holiday activities with food etc.
- 59 In February 2020 the Council approved a series of one-off investments for the financial year 2020/21. Within this was an additional £1.5m for anti-poverty initiatives to boost welfare assistance, employability and accessible food programmes.
- 60 At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic the council allocated funds from existing Poverty Action Steering Group budgets to support short-to-medium term actions to help our residents experiencing financial hardship, or to prevent residents from being negatively impacted by the pandemic. In addition the Council allocated £1.4m to community groups through the AAPs in order to provide food and essential welfare support to people through the pandemic.

61 The Government allocated a small grant of £693k, also for food and essential supplies over the summer period with guidance as to how the money can be spent. This gives some flexibility in how this grant could augment the existing PASG funds and provide additional activity across the Poverty Action Plan. A table detailing high level expenditure and the relevant areas of activity is detailed below:

Budget	£	Main / Potential Activities
Welfare Assistance Scheme Daily Living Expenses/Settlement Grant	500,000	Increased Demand Broaden Criteria Target additional groups
Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)	500,000	Increased Demand
Advice in County Durham Co-Ordination	220,000	Extend existing provision Increased demand for existing services Debt / Money Advice
Targeted employment support	500,000	Tailored employment advice and guidance. Flexible funds Youth employment support
Food and essential welfare support	£1,400,000	Food deliveries to vulnerable residents Support to VCS with essential running costs
Activities with Food	125,000	Holiday Activities with Food through AAPs
Foodbank Investment	35,000	Debt Money Advice Additional Storage
Subsidised Meal Provision	200,000	The Bread and Butter Thing Fairshare Licences
Local Lockdown Emergency Food Fund	55,000	COVID-19 response and Contingency plus second wave boxes

Covid Winter Grant Scheme

- 62 On 8 November 2020 the Government announced that additional funding and support would be made available to local authorities (LAs) to support vulnerable households during the winter period. The total amount being allocated to this scheme nationally is £170 million and is in addition to the wider support package for disadvantaged families and children.
- 63 The Council have been allocated £1,872,512.86 and will be responsible for administering the scheme in County Durham and the Government believes LAs have the local ties and knowledge and are best placed to identify and help those children, families and individuals most in need.
- 64 It is expected that each local authority develops a “local eligibility framework and approach”. The funding is to be used from December 2020 up to the end of March 2021 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food and utility bills (heating, cooking, lighting) and water for household purposes (including drinking, washing, cooking, central heating, sewerage and sanitary purposes), or other related essentials. The DWP have confirmed that if issued via vouchers, that they can be used in April 2021.
- 65 The Council has developed a ‘local eligibility framework and approach’ and has engaged with the LA7 group of North East councils in order to achieve a consistent approach across the region where funding is being mainly targeted to providing food support for those households with children with eligibility for FSM. Our framework and approach consists of three main elements:
- (a) provide support to children from 0 to 19 who meet the eligibility criteria in the form of a food voucher to the value of £20 per Free School Meal eligible child per week (£15 to cover food and £5 to free up family finances to help toward utility costs) for the two weeks of the Christmas break and one week for the February 2021 half term;
 - (b) a payment of £21,000 to the Feeding Families programme so they can provide a Christmas Hamper to vulnerable families with children identified through the One Point Service; and
 - (c) a discretionary fund for social care teams to access to provide support to vulnerable children identified as being at need and requiring clothing, bedding, other household items which will ensure they are safe and warm over the winter period.

Future Direction

- 66 Whilst the Council has supported its most vulnerable residents over recent years and has intensified support during the COVID-19 pandemic there is much still to do to promote social inclusion and support people and their families over the coming months and years, particularly given the difficult economic situation.
- 67 The Council is undertaking a review of advice and guidance in the County to ensure consistency of the availability of advice services. Coupled with this are improvements to the Advice in County Durham Partnership Portal to ensure that the “no wrong door” approach whereby agencies can cross refer clients to a full range of advice services is enhanced with a case management approach and improvements in data management to target services. The Council is also looking to increase advice on money management, debt advice services and access to cheap credit through the Council’s housing solutions team and partner agencies. The Council is also in the process of reviewing its service level agreement with Citizens Advice County Durham to ensure that it delivers the outcomes expected and sets a framework for future collaboration.
- 68 The Council is actively supporting The Bread and Butter Thing, a charity operating from Manchester who work with national food distribution agencies to redistribute surplus food in an accessible way, through community organisations, to local residents in areas of disadvantage. The programme was launched in County Durham in Eden Hill in November 2020 and benefits families and individuals in the locality. Development work is ongoing with further community groups and schools in the Crook, Bishop Auckland, Cockfield and Evenwood, and Ushaw Moor localities with the expectation of greater roll out over the next 12 months. The Council has also worked with the charity to help them recently establish a North East base in Chilton County Durham, further extending the reach into the County.
- 69 The Council is investing in a range of employability measures in response to the increase in unemployment and the cessation of the furlough scheme. Through the PASG the Council is supporting Youth Employment Hubs to help young people find employment as well as the Kickstart scheme both as an employer and local co-ordinator. The Council is supplementing European Social Fund (ESF) funded employability programmes, which provide support for unemployed people, with Council funded staff and flexible funds to provide help and support for those recently or facing redundancy.
- 70 The Council has boosted contingencies to provide food and other essential supplies to vulnerable residents should further COVID-19

related restrictions come into place. This will be integral to the further development of the County Durham Together approach to empower communities, promote self-help and holistic person-centred services across council services and a range of statutory partners.

Conclusion

- 71 The Council is in the front-line of responding to these challenges through the services we provide and our network of AAPs supporting local action. Working with our partners, we are at the heart of our local areas and interact with residents lives on a daily basis and are committed to achieving greater social mobility, fairness and community cohesion.
- 72 We have a direct financial relationship with our residents: collecting council tax payments, administering benefits and other discretionary payments. This provides us with an opportunity to identify households in financial difficulty and provide them with support and to manage the nature of that relationship in a way that supports financial inclusion.
- 73 In such circumstances, it is vital that the Council maintains its partnership-based approach and continues to engage with affected residents in the decisions we take to deliver the Poverty Action Strategy and Action Plan, to ensure we make it everyone's business to respond to poverty and the risk to financial exclusion and homelessness.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- [Cabinet report, Poverty Issues, 18 November 2020](#)
- [Cabinet report, COVID-19 planning and response, 5 June 2020](#)
- [Cabinet report, Welfare reform and poverty issues, 11 September 2019](#)
- [Cabinet report, Welfare reform and poverty issues, 13 September 2017](#)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications - There are no direct legal implications arising out of this report, which is provided by way of update to Members. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the UK's exit from the European Union may have significant legal implications. The nature and extent of these implications are unknown and Officers continue to monitor changes in primary legislation for the pandemic and Brexit proposals to assess the likely future impacts on the council and residents of the county.

Finance - The council supports welfare provision and poverty alleviation through a number of service budgets across the council, such as the Welfare Assistance Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) policy which are administered by the council's Revenues and Benefits Service. The council also offers discretionary County Tax relief to individuals and households in financial hardship and has protected residents from government reductions in Council Tax Benefit through the approach it has taken to local Council Tax Support. The council has been allocated government grant of £693,361 to help cover the costs for emergency provision for residents. The longer term financial implications for the council are at this stage difficult to quantify, and are dependent on the duration of local restrictions, future 'lockdowns' and the speed of economic recovery. Future MTFP reports to Cabinet will need to consider the financial risks relating to the longer term impact of COVID-19.

Consultation - The review of the Poverty Action Plan was informed by feedback following informal consultation with council services and partners during the first quarter of 2020/21.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty - The council's Welfare Assistance Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments policy and Local Council Tax Support Scheme have been subject to equality impact assessments where appropriate.

Climate Change - Not applicable.

Human Rights - Not applicable.

Crime and Disorder - Not applicable.

Staffing - There are no staffing implications.

Accommodation - Not applicable.

Risk - Not applicable.

Procurement - Not applicable.

Appendix 2: National Policy update – Welfare and COVID-19

National Policy update – Welfare and COVID-19

Increase to Universal Credit standard allowance

In March 2020, the Government increased the standard allowance of Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit by £20 a week. This is a temporary increase and is due to end in April 2021 unless the Government commits to making it a permanent feature. Currently, the additional £20 per week does not go to people claiming legacy benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance, Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support.

Job Retention Scheme ('Furlough scheme')

On 20 March 2020 the introduction of a Job Retention Scheme (JRS) was announced, whereby the Government would pay the equivalent of 80% of the wages of staff put on 'furlough' (a period of temporary leave of absence on reduced pay) during the lock-down.

On 12 May 2020, the Chancellor made a further announcement that the furlough scheme would be extended by a further four months with workers continuing to receive 80% of their current salary through to the end of July. In addition, from the start of August, furloughed workers were able to return to work part-time with employers being asked to pay a percentage towards the salaries of their furloughed staff. The employer payments were expected to substitute the contribution the Government made, ensuring that staff continue to receive 80% of their salary, up to £2,500 a month. This scheme was to be withdrawn fully on 31 October 2020.

On 8 July 2020, The Chancellor announced the introduction of a new Job Retention Bonus (JRB) to provide additional support to employers who keep on their furloughed employees in meaningful employment, after the JRS ends on 31 October 2020.

On 31 October 2020, following the Government's announcement to introduce new lockdown measures in England starting on 5 November, the JRS has been extended for a month with employees receiving 80% of their current salary for hours not worked, up to a maximum of £2,500. Under the extended scheme, the cost for employers of retaining workers will be reduced compared to the current scheme, which ended on 31 October. Businesses will have flexibility to bring furloughed employees back to work on a part time basis or furlough them full-time, and will only be asked to cover National Insurance and employer pension contributions which, for the average claim, accounts for just 5% of total employment costs.

The Chancellor subsequently announced on 5 November the 'furlough' scheme will be extended until the end of March 2021. The policy will be

reviewed in January regarding employer contributions and the JRB will be paused.

Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)

On 26 March 2020, the Chancellor announced the introduction of the Self Employment Income Support Scheme. This scheme allowed self employed people to claim a taxable grant (up to 80% of their average monthly profits over the last three years, up to £2,500 a month) if their business had been adversely affected on or before 13 July 2020.

This scheme was subsequently extended on 29 May and a second taxable grant worth 70% of average monthly trading profits, was introduced (paid out in a single instalment covering three months' worth of profits, and capped at £6,570 in total).

On 24 September this scheme was again extended for those who are currently eligible for SEISS and are continuing to actively trade but face reduced demand due to coronavirus. The initial lump sum will cover three months' worth of profits for the period from November to the end of January 2021. This is worth 20% of average monthly profits, up to a total of £1,875.

The Government announced on 22 October, that contributions to incomes for the self-employed have also been increased. The Government announcement increases the amount of profits covered by the two forthcoming self-employed grants from 20% to 40% of people's incomes meaning that the maximum grant increases to £3,750.

To reflect the recent changes to the 'furlough' scheme, the Government announced on 2 November 2020 the SEISS would support self-employed individuals with 80% of their average trading profits for November, and to ensure those who need support get it as soon as possible, payments will also be made more quickly with the claims window being brought forward from 14 December to 30 November.

Job Support Scheme

On 24 September under the Government's 'Winter Economy Plan' the Chancellor announced a new Job Support Scheme (JSS) to be introduced from 1 November which will run for six months to help keep employees attached to the workforce.

The Government will contribute towards the wages of employees who are working fewer than normal hours due to decreased demand. Employers will continue to pay the wages of staff for the hours they work - but for the hours not worked, the Government and the employer will each pay one third of their equivalent salary. The level of grant will be calculated based on the employee's usual salary, capped at £697.92 per month.

On 9 October, the Chancellor, announced an expansion of the JSS. Firms whose premises are legally required to shut for some period over winter as part of local or national restrictions will receive grants to pay the wages of staff who cannot work. The Government will support eligible businesses by paying two thirds of each employees' salary (or 67%), up to a maximum of £2,100 a month. The scheme will begin on 1 November and will be available for six months, with a review point in January. Only those forced to shut rather than suffering significantly reduced demand for their service due to the pandemic or government measures qualify.

The Government announced a further expansion to the JSS on 22 October. Previously, for businesses which can open, employees had to work 33% of normal hours. This minimum hour requirement has now reduced to 20% (i.e. those working one day a week will be eligible). Employer contributions for the hours not worked have reduced from 33% to 5%. The scheme shall apply to all eligible businesses in all alert levels. Employers will continue to receive the £1,000 Job Retention Bonus. The JSS for businesses legally required to close remains unchanged.

The Government announced on 31 October that the Job Support Scheme, which was scheduled to come in on Sunday 1 November, has been postponed until the 'furlough' scheme ends.

Test and Trace Support Payments

The Government announced on 20 September, the introduction of a one off £500 payment for those people on lower incomes, on qualifying benefits, who cannot work from home due to the nature of their work and have lost income as a result of being instructed through Test and Trace to self-isolate from 28 September, to be administered by local authorities. Those who must self-isolate for reasons other than an instruction from test and trace do not qualify.

Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSG)

Finally, the Chancellor also announced on 22 October, a new grant scheme which will provide additional funding to allow local authorities to support businesses in high-alert level areas which are not legally closed but which are severely impacted by the restrictions on socialising. The funding local authorities will receive will be based on the number of hospitality, hotel, B&B, and leisure businesses in their area. Grants will be provided up to £2,100 depending on the rateable value for every month that Alert Level Tier 2 restrictions apply. This is equivalent to 70% of the grants received by closed businesses in Alert Level Tier 3. It will be up to local authorities to determine which businesses are eligible for grant funding in their local areas, and what precise funding to allocate to each business. These grants shall be retrospective, any area that has been under these restrictions, can claim backdated payments up to August.

This was superseded on 31 October with the announcement of new lockdown measures in England, where business premises forced to close in England are to receive grants worth up to £3,000 per month under the LRSG. Also, £1.1bn is being given to Local Authorities, distributed on the basis of £20 per head, for one-off payments to enable them to support businesses more broadly.

Kickstart Scheme

On 2 September the Government announced the launch of the kickstart scheme which will provide funding to create new job placements for 16 to 24-year olds on Universal Credit who are at risk of long-term unemployment. Employers of all sizes can apply for funding which covers: 100% of the National Minimum Wage (or the National Living Wage depending on the age of the participant) for 25 hours per week for a total of 6 months; associated; and employer minimum automatic enrolment contributions.

Job Entry Targeted Support (JETS)

On 5 October 2020 the Government launched the Job Entry Targeted Support Scheme. This scheme will help those out of work for three months via the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) access to tailored, flexible support to quickly get back into employment. The new programme will see several providers offer a range of help, including specialist advice on how people can move into growing sectors, as well as CV and interview coaching. The scheme is likely to be contracted to private employment agencies, mostly out of County.

Free School Meal Vouchers

During the announcement by the Prime Minister on 18 March that all schools would close on Friday 20 March, it was announced that meals and vouchers would be offered to children on Free School Meals (FSM) and later announced on 6 April that this would include the two week period for the Easter holidays. The vouchers were worth £15 a week for each eligible child however not all localities had participating supermarkets.

On 16 June, the Government announced the scheme was due to end at the end of the summer term in July but following a high profile campaign by a national figure they announced the scheme would be extended to cover the six weeks holiday period.

On 8 November, the Government released a press release from the Department of Work and Pensions stating the Government will spend £400m to support children with free meals over the holidays, amongst other packages of support. This includes: £170m COVID-19 Winter Grant Scheme to support children families and the most vulnerable over winter – the funding will be ring-fenced with at least 80% earmarked to support food and bills; Holiday

Activities and Food programme will be expanded across England, covering Easter, Summer and Christmas in 2020; Payments from the Healthy Start scheme are set to rise from £3.10 to £4.25 per week from April 202; and Government has also pledged additional funding of £16m for food distribution charities such as FareShare.

Free food parcels for clinically shielding residents

For those residents in England that have been advised by the NHS to shield, the Government provided free weekly food parcel delivered to residents' doorsteps. This was offered from 7 April to 26 June 2020.

The Government food parcel was a free weekly box of basic food and essential supplies. The boxes contained items that the Government considered to be a week's worth of food that an individual or family needed to live on for one week.

Council Tax Hardship Fund

The Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary confirmed on 24 March the Government's £500 million Hardship Fund to provide council tax relief to vulnerable people and households to help those affected most by coronavirus.

Councils were also able to use the funding to provide further discretionary support to vulnerable people through other support arrangements such as local welfare schemes.

Rent eviction ban

On 23 March the Coronavirus Bill passed through the Commons and Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary made an announcement any emergency legislation would suspend new evictions from social or private rented accommodation while this national emergency is taking place and no new possession proceedings through applications to the court would be able to start during the crisis.

This was subsequently extended in June up until 23 August, but was extended by a further four weeks until 20 September and also requiring landlords to give tenants a six-month notice period, meaning that no tenant would find themselves evicted before March next year.

Mortgage payment holiday

On 17 March 2020, the Chancellor announced that homeowners would be able to claim a three month break from their mortgage repayments if unable to repay because of COVID-19.

On 22 May the Treasury announced that homeowners struggling to pay their mortgage due to Coronavirus would be able to extend their mortgage payment holiday for a further three months or start making reduced payments.

The Government announced on 31 October that mortgage payment holidays would not end on 31 October. Borrowers who have been impacted by coronavirus and have not yet had a mortgage payment holiday will be entitled to a six month holiday, and those that have already started a mortgage payment holiday will be able to top up to six months without this being recorded on their credit file.

Homelessness

On 17 March, the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government announced that councils would be given £3.2m from the Government as part of an emergency scheme called "Everyone In", which was aimed at stopping the spread of the virus. On 26 March, the Minister for Local Government and Homelessness wrote to local authorities asking them to urgently accommodate all rough sleepers and focus on the provision of adequate facilities to enable people to adhere to the guidance on hygiene or isolation, including for those who are at risk of sleeping rough. Local authorities may use third party accommodation providers to comply with this request.

On 14 May the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has announced £6million of emergency funding to provide relief for frontline homelessness charitable organisations who are directly affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing wrote to local authorities on 28 May requesting that when arranging move-on accommodation for people sleeping rough, local authorities: explore sustainable options, including through partnerships with housing associations and in the private rented sector; encourage people sleeping rough to stay with friends or family, 'where appropriate and possible'; and where no move-on possibilities exist, provide short-term accommodation while looking into long-term options.

Freeze on benefit conditionality and sanctions

On 20 March the Chancellor announced that people on benefits and Universal Credit would not be penalised from 30 March to 1 July 2020 if they failed to look for work or make themselves available for work due to coronavirus.

The Government also confirmed that the DWP would be automatically extending all awards and reassessments for health and disability benefits during this period.

Ban on bailiff visits

The Taking Control of Goods and Certification of Enforcement Agents (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020, laid in Parliament on 25 April and came into effect immediately, preventing bailiff visits during the period in which Coronavirus restrictions are in place. Bailiffs resumed operations in England and Wales on 24 August.

Appendix 3: Poverty Action Strategy & Plan

Durham County Council – Poverty Action Steering Group

Revised Poverty Action Strategy September 2019- September 2021

June 2020 COVID-19 revision

Purpose

Our Poverty Action Strategy (PAS) has been revised earlier than originally planned in response to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).

This revised strategy aims to provide focus and direction on priorities for improving services and opportunities for residents in County Durham who are experiencing: immediate financial hardship due to the economic shocks of the coronavirus pandemic; and, impacts of longer-term poverty. This strategy will be reviewed in September 2021.

For those responsible for delivering services, any future work programmes should contribute to achieving the aims set out in this strategy.

Introduction

The council's Poverty Action Steering Group (PASG) co-ordinates the delivery of a range of new and existing policy work which seeks to achieve a much broader understanding of the issues affecting residents, resulting from continuing changes to welfare and other issues which mean that residents can experience poverty. Building on this understanding, and underpinned by data and intelligence from Durham Insights, the group seeks to identify actions to support residents and help address identified inequalities through our Poverty Action Plan (PAP). The PAP was approved by Cabinet in September 2019.

However, more recently, we have had to respond dynamically and innovatively revising our approach as the national coronavirus action plan and recovery strategy evolves. The council has worked nationally, regionally and locally to protect our communities and to support those affected by the pandemic, economically, socially and in relation to their own physical and mental health, and the outcomes from the council's Inequality Impact Assessment will further inform this evolving action plan to seek to reduce the widening gap for some of our residents.

We know there are considerable challenges ahead if we are to deliver on our vision. In order to overcome these challenges, we have revised our Poverty Action Strategy which includes the revised Poverty Action Plan and sets out what needs to be achieved in the next 12-18 months in relation to each of our key priorities.

The action plan includes a renewed focus on ensuring our strategies, policies, plans and programmes all link together to ensure an intelligence led and evidence informed, consistent and ongoing focus on our residents who experiencing financial hardship for the first time or hardship and/or poverty which has been compounded by the coronavirus pandemic. It includes new and revised actions and commitments which will enable us to deliver the key priorities we have identified as being most important to help our residents whose finances have been negatively impacted by the associated

economic shocks of the coronavirus pandemic and for reducing overall poverty levels in County Durham.

Vision

Our vision is: *to improve the standard of living and daily lives of those residents in County Durham who are currently experiencing immediate financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associate economic shocks; and to help alleviate long term issues that can lead households on low incomes to experience financial pressures and poverty.*

Strategic Aims

We have to anticipate that society will be affected by COVID-19 for some time to come. We therefore need to continue to increase our understanding of the local impacts of change, so we can best use and direct resources to help continue to mitigate the impacts where we can, through well thought-out and targeted approaches. To achieve the best possible outcomes of our vision for residents experiencing immediate financial hardship and/or poverty, our strategic aims are:

- *To improve our understanding of immediate financial hardship and both short and long term poverty, and the impacts on County Durham's residents;*
 - *Short term – restarting/resetting society – June to December 2020*
 - *Medium term – living with COVID-19 – 2021*
 - *Longer term – recovering – 2022;*
- *To foster employability, personal wellbeing and sense of worth for residents experiencing immediate hardship and/or poverty;*
- *Residents receive the best support and advice available concerning their financial situation; and*
- *Children and families have access to specific resources in response to the measures in place to combat COVID-19.*

Key Priorities

Underpinning our strategic aims are the key priorities and detailed actions in our revised Poverty Action Plan 2020-2021. This plan ensures we build on improvements already made and deliver new/improved initiatives required to support our residents experiencing the various types of financial hardship and varying levels of poverty.

Resources

New workstreams will be established to deliver some of the immediate actions where necessary, although it is expected a lot of the activity can be delivered through existing resources and organisations. Working with partners from across the public, private and third sector will continue to underpin our approach. The council has consistently recognised we cannot reduce poverty on our own: collaboration and a focus on delivering common outcomes remains a top priority.

Governance

The council's Poverty Action Steering Group will continue to provide leadership and direction in delivering against the action plan.

The PASG will:

- Monitor the situation across the county;
- Make practical recommendations for policy and action to address the issues identified and focus on equity of support and target to those who need it the most
- Improve co-ordination and co-operation between service groupings and organisations, and establish new interfaces with existing sector led workstreams working to address the immediate financial impacts associated with the coronavirus pandemic and poverty at a local level;
- Monitor the delivery of the action plan established to respond to the issues identified.

Monitoring and Review

Progress will be reported to the council's Cabinet, the County Durham Partnership, The COVID-19 Health, Welfare and Community Recovery Group as well as updates to partners and other organisations etc.

The original strategy and action plan were originally subject to review every two years, due September 2021. This date will remain, for this revised strategy and action plan, unless circumstances dictate that a review is required sooner. The strategy and action plan will be revised to ensure that it is current and reflects the communities in County Durham and what our residents are telling us, in or around September 2021.



Poverty Action Strategy – COVID-19 Plan on a Page 2020-2021

Workstreams & Immediate Actions

Vision: to improve the standard of living and daily lives of those residents in County Durham who are currently experiencing immediate financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associate economic shocks; and to help alleviate long term issues that can lead households on low incomes to experience financial pressures and poverty.

Workstreams	Community Resilience	Employment & Personal Sense of Worth	Welfare & Money Matters	Children & Families
Immediate actions to look at	<p>Enhance the 'holistic care/person centred management' – no wrong door approach.</p> <p>Enhance Advice in County Durham Partnership Support to help partners cope with increased demand.</p> <p>Share intelligence on emerging impacts between services key partners and new smaller groups to inform service delivery and projects/initiatives etc. both short term and long term</p> <p>Enhance the 'Volunteer' programme offer to fill new and emerging gaps in provision and to provide additional support to immediate actions.</p> <p>Digital skills team (volunteers) set up to work with residents to help/support them confidently conduct more online activities including: employment activities, housekeeping, accessing services and social/companionship type activities etc.</p>	<p>Enhance the 'holistic care/person centred management' – no wrong door approach.</p> <p>New/amended provision required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To meet the needs of new claimants groups who have never been in this situation. Advice and support re employment contract disputes as a result of COVID-19 activities. Link with 'Volunteers' programme Job match programme (careers service) Utilise social value contracts for DCC and Business Durham Tailored support for residents new out of education (i.e. 18 yr age group) and new into the job market during COVID-19 climate. <p>Includes PH initiatives re mental/physical health and wellbeing.</p>	<p>Enhance the 'holistic care/person centred management' – no wrong door approach.</p> <p>Map support re food and basic provisions and target funding/projects to plug any gaps.</p> <p>Revise Welfare Assistance Scheme with additional flexibility and discretion for COVID-19 climate.</p> <p>Revise Welfare Rights Service offer to provide wider advice and support relating to COVID-19 including: debt advice, personal finance and budgeting support etc.</p> <p>Enhance support to Credit Union to provide residents with low/no interest loans; personal finance and budgeting support etc.</p> <p>Enhance DCC Managing Money Better Service offer to provide residents with debt advice, personal finance and budgeting support etc.</p> <p>Produce baseline of financial support available from social and private landlords for tenants impacted by COVID-19 and identify gaps.</p> <p>Enhance Housing Solutions service offer to include tailored advice and support for residents with mortgages.</p>	<p>Enhance the 'holistic care/person centred management' – no wrong door approach.</p> <p>Work with schools to increase FSM voucher/meal take up during school closure period.</p> <p>Holiday activities with food programme revised to accommodate lock down/social distancing.</p> <p>Link with schools to support those children and families experiencing mental/physical health issues as a result of the COVID-19 climate.</p> <p>Link with schools to support those children and families experiencing difficulties with the transition back to school.</p> <p>Enhance support for children and families experiencing domestic abuse and violence as a result of the COVID-19 climate.</p> <p>Culture and sport to provide additional alternative activities for families with children out of school.</p>

The actions of the workstream will be unpinned by effective data and intelligence regularly updated on [Durham Insight](#).

Durham County Council – Poverty Action Steering Group

2019-2021 Poverty Plan v4.0

Aim	Key priorities	Actions	Due date
<p>1. To improve our understanding of the types of poverty and its impact on County Durham residents</p>	<p>1.1. Have a greater understanding of new and emerging population needs, pooling all data/intelligence across a broad range of services/partners and analysing data to inform existing/new service provision and use of resources.</p>	<p>1.1.a. Produce Joint Service Needs Assessment (JSNA) factsheets on poverty and share via Durham Insights to help inform practice/service development/partnership working etc.</p> <p>1.1.b. Use internal and where available external data to develop insight and profiles of groups (including housing data), likely to be impacted by poverty in order to improve communications and engagement with target groups.</p> <p>1.1.c. Share intelligence on emerging impacts of COVID-19 between services key partners and new smaller groups to inform service delivery and projects/initiatives etc. both short term and long term.</p>	<p>APS will be updated quarterly in light of the current climate</p> <p>Full programme completed by March 2021</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
	<p>1.2. Staff providing frontline services (and Members) understand the new and emerging needs relating to hardship caused by the COVID-19 economic climate and the longer term impacts of poverty and how these affect communities and families within County Durham and are equipped with the relevant level of information to quickly help residents.</p>	<p>1.2.a. Develop content for induction programme for existing employees, elected members and Member communications covering poverty in the county, impacts on residents, alleviation measures and signposting to advice and support, so that staff are able to spot poverty and know what to do to help.</p> <p>1.2.b. Include financial wellbeing in the council’s Better Health at Work Award programme.</p> <p>1.2.c. Review and revise information, correspondence and website on council tax, benefits and concessionary support to reduce jargon, simplify and make more customer friendly (in line with the council’s ‘outside-in’ principle).</p> <p>1.2.d Review and revise customer service procedures and processes in order to join-up welfare advice and support at the first point of contact with a resident. To provide a holistic support offer for residents</p>	<p>May 2021</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>December 2020</p> <p>March 2021</p>

Aim	Key priorities	Actions	Due date
	<p>1.3. Partners work collectively to identify and deliver new and/or amended advice/guidance/support to help address the immediate issues associated with the COVID-19 economic climate and the longer term impacts of poverty.</p>	<p>1.3.a. Research and develop poverty alleviation measures including the Durham Living Wage through social value provisions in procurement contracts. Promote through procurement processes and Business Durham business liaison.</p> <p>1.3.b. Develop toolkit for local organisations to help their employees, for example signposting information, promotion of salary savings schemes with local credit unions, access to ICT to make online claims.</p> <p>1.3.c. Promote and increase Durham Living Wage accreditation among employers in County Durham.</p> <p>1.3.d. Coordinate a partnership with landlords to share best practice and understand the impacts of COVID-19 and long term poverty.</p> <p>1.3.e. Enhance Advice in County Durham Partnership support to help partners cope with increased demand.</p> <p>1.3.f. Enhance the 'Volunteer' programme offer to fill new and emerging gaps in provision and to provide additional support to immediate actions.</p> <p>1.3.g. Facilitate and fund the set up of 'The Bread and Butter Thing' in County Durham.</p>	<p>Complete</p> <p>March 2021</p> <p>March 2021</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>December 2020</p> <p>Complete</p>
	<p>1.4. Residents have access to digital help/support to enable them to confidently conduct more online activities including housekeeping, accessing services and social/companionship type activities etc.</p>	<p>1.4.a. Digital skills team (volunteers) set up to work with residents to help/support them confidently conduct more online activities including: employment activities, housekeeping, accessing services and social/companionship type activities etc.</p> <p>See also: 1.3.e. 1.3.f.</p>	<p>January 2021</p>

Aim	Key priorities	Actions	Due date
2. To foster employability, personal wellbeing and sense of worth for residents experiencing immediate hardship and/or poverty	2.1. Have an in-depth understanding of immediate impacts the current economic climate has on different employment type groups to inform existing/new service provision.	2.1.a. Review baseline mapping exercise to identify holistic support available for basic skills and employability. Refresh programme of support, in the light of findings of the mapping exercise.	January 2021
	2.2. Residents who experience mental/physical health issues as a result of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic or are affected by poverty/changes to welfare receive the most appropriate advice and support from DCC.	2.2.a. Include specific objectives and actions on poverty alleviation in the reviewed Health and Wellbeing Strategy.	September 2021
		2.2.b. Scope which appropriate front line health and social care staff, housing staff could provide welfare advice and signposting as part of their core remit e.g. primary care, health visitors etc. Develop workforce training sessions to increase skills and competence to do the brief intervention.	January 2021
		2.2.c. Develop joint working practices between housing and health team to assist homeless people and those threatened with homelessness where people experience physical/mental health issues.	Complete
	2.3. Residents have access to suite of programmes, schemes, services etc. for all aspects of their employment journey which provide the appropriate employment guidance and/or support needed at any point of time in their working life.	2.3.a. Develop new and/or amended existing provision required: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale up Durham Advance employment advice, mentoring and individual support • Scale up Youth employment support through Durham Works programme • Work with Job Centre plus to promote access flexible funds • Work with regional and local partners to develop online job match programmes • Work with national, regional and local partners to enhance the digital skills offer, access to wifi, and develop Link with Durham Volunteers programme 	January 2021

Aim	Key priorities	Actions	Due date
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise social value contracts for DCC and Business Durham in respect of inward investment opportunities and link to local labour • Work up additional wage subsidy scheme and prepare to bid for funds • Develop a communication plan with a menu of services and contacts for unemployed people • Co-ordinate with the FE sector to enhance skills training and apprentice programmes through ESF and other funding sources • Explore the option to increase temporary, part time, public sector employment and apprenticeships 	
	2.4. Have a greater understanding of long term inequalities in employment and analyse data to identify increased opportunities to support residents into training and/or work.	See also: 2.1.	Ongoing
		2.3.b. Enhance joint working practices between employment/training and health team to assist clients where they experience physical/mental health issues.	Complete

Aim	Key priorities	Actions	Due date
3. Residents receive the best support and advice available concerning their financial situation.	3.1. Have a comprehensive understanding of the different types and levels of support available to help residents experiencing any aspect of financial hardship including access to food and basic provisions.	3.1.a. Map support re money matters (including food and basic provisions) to target funding/projects to plug any gaps.	Complete
	3.2. Staff providing frontline services (and Members) are equipped with the relevant level of information to efficiently help and/or refer residents to the most appropriate support.	3.2.a. Develop an early identification and support programme for frontline staff and partners to guide and support families with children most at risk of, or currently experiencing financial hardship and ensure support available is correctly targeted.	Complete
		3.2.b. Deliver up to date briefing sessions to elected members on child poverty and the work being delivered to mitigate the impacts.	Complete
		3.2.c. Develop an early identification and support programme for frontline staff and partners to guide and support adult households most at risk of, or currently experiencing financial hardship and ensure support available is correctly targeted.	March 2021
		3.2.d. Continue to train frontline staff across DCC and partners to use AiCD portal.	December 2020
		3.2.e. Undertake feasibility study of using AiCD portal for all poverty-related referrals	Complete

Aim	Key priorities	Actions	Due date
		3.2.f. Enhance the ‘holistic care/person centred management’ – no wrong door approach. See also: 1.1.b. 1.2.a. 1.2.c. 1.2.d.	December 2020
		3.2.g. Baseline mapping exercise to identify support available for legal support identifying any gaps and potential schemes/projects to fill gaps.	March 2021
	3.3. DCC continues to provide financial support (or equivalent) for residents affected by the COVID-19 economic climate, poverty and/or changes to welfare where it is appropriate.	3.3.a. Revise Welfare Assistance Scheme with additional flexibility and discretion for COVID-19 climate.	Complete
		3.3.b. Revise Welfare Rights Service offer to provide wider advice and support relating to COVID-19 including: debt advise, personal finance and budgeting support etc. See also: 1.1.b. 1.2.c. 1.2.d. 3.1.a.	Complete
	3.4. Residents receive the financial support which they are entitled to (i.e. non DCC financial support).	3.4.a. Enhance support to Credit Union to provide residents with low/no interest loans; personal finance and budgeting support etc.	January 2021
		3.4.b. Enhance DCC Managing Money Better Service offer to provide residents with debt advice, personal finance and budgeting support etc.	January 2021
		3.4.c. Enhance Housing Solutions service offer to include tailored advice and support for residents with mortgages.	January 2021
		3.4.d. Produce baseline of financial support available from social and private landlords for tenants impacted by COVID-19 and identify gaps.	January 2021

Aim	Key priorities	Actions	Due date
		See also: 3.1. 3.2. 3.3.b.	
	3.5. Residents in County Durham have a high level of knowledge for basic personal finance.	3.5.a. Produce a baseline of financial literacy training available to primary and secondary schools and the FE sector. 3.5.b. Develop a coordinated programme of financial literacy and personal finance training to the above. 3.5.c. Develop learning materials for primary and secondary schools to improve financial literacy and personal finance. 3.5.d. Develop a financial literacy and personal finance module for inclusion in the DCC apprenticeship programme, with a view to rolling out to other employers. 3.5.e. Explore feasibility of DCC providing Looked After Children with a credit union account and a nominal annual payment. 3.5.f. Working with training providers to build personal resilience amongst trainees.	January 2021 January 2021 January 2021 March 2021 March 2021 March 2021
	3.6. Residents are aware of the dangers of using pay day and doorstep lenders and have access to alternative means of support.	3.6.a. To work with partner agencies to deliver a programme of multi-agency community roadshows across the county (six per year) e.g. loan sharks, scams etc. 3.6.b. Explore feasibility of restricting access to payday lender webpages from DCC public access computers, linking instead to credit union lenders.	June 2021 Complete

Aim	Key priorities	Actions	Due date
4. Children and families have access to specific resources in response to the measures in place to combat COVID-19	4.1. Families with children eligible for FSM continue to access FSM food/vouchers during the temporary school closures.	4.1.a. Work with schools to increase FSM voucher/meal take up during school closure period including school holidays.	Complete
	4.2. Children and families have access to stimulating and enriching activities during the temporary school closures.	4.2.a. Holiday activities with food programme revised to accommodate lock down/social distancing.	July 2021
	4.3. Children and families who experience mental/physical health issues as a result of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic or are affected by poverty/changes to welfare receive the most appropriate advice and support from DCC.	4.3.a. Work with schools to support those children and families experiencing mental/physical health issues as a result of the COVID-19 climate.	Complete
		4.3.b. Work with schools to support those children and families experiencing difficulties with the transition back to school.	Complete
		4.3.c. Enhance support for children and families experiencing domestic abuse and violence as a result of the COVID-19 climate.	Complete
	4.4. Narrow the gap in access to culture, leisure, sport and wellbeing for children and young people.	4.4.a. Undertake a health equity audit of who is currently accessing council leisure facilities to understand how we target our offer better to reduce inequality of access and opportunity.	March 2021
		4.4.b. Undertake a feasibility study of establishing a budget to support improving access to leisure facilities (e.g. discounts, promotion and transport) for children and families referred by social care and health agencies	March 2021
		4.4.c. Explore the funding options for the provision of personal male and female hygiene products to young people through secondary schools, One Point centres and family centres etc.	Complete
		4.4.d. Review and evaluate pilot of family centres providing food, clothing, personal hygiene products etc.	Complete

Aim	Key priorities	Actions	Due date
		<p>4.4.e. Review and evaluate pilot of free activities with food provision during 2019/2020 school holidays and undertake a feasibility study of establishing a budget for future provision.</p> <p>4.4.f. Develop and roll out 'child poverty pledge' for teams and partners to sign up to set of standards/promises to help alleviate child poverty.</p> <p>4.4.g. Review and enhance the 'Cutting the cost of the school day' project.</p> <p>See also: 1.1.a. 1.1.b. 1.1.c.</p>	<p>Complete</p> <p>February 2021</p> <p>December 2020</p>
	<p>4.5. Raise aspirations and resilience of children and young people in County Durham making the move into work easier so they reach their full potential.</p>	<p>4.5.a. Develop 'My Future is Durham' initiative into a wider programme for schools and colleges.</p> <p>4.5.b. Explore the development of specialist careers advice and pathways for Looked after Children, Care Leavers and SEND to enable young people to realise their aspirations.</p> <p>4.5.c. Explore future funding options to further develop DurhamWorks programme.</p> <p>4.5.d. Review options to encourage career development and aspirations through DCC's apprenticeship programme for 2020/21.</p>	<p>June 2021</p> <p>September 2020</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>September 2021</p>