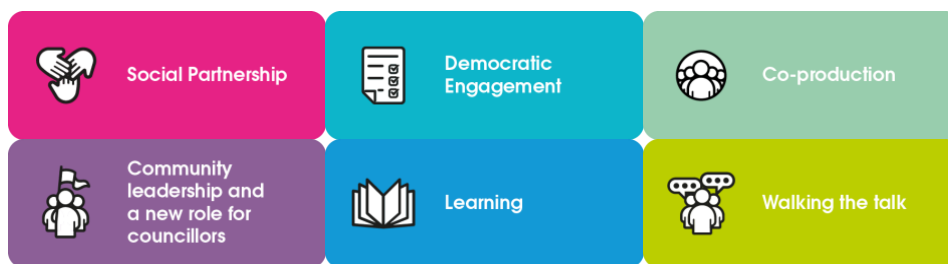


POVERTY



Cheshire West and Chester Council

Talking about poverty in Cheshire West and Chester to build a Fairer Future

Cheshire West and Chester is home to over 343,000 people with diverse, attractive and prosperous neighbourhoods that generally afford residents a good quality of life. However, there are pockets of intense inequality in opportunities and outcomes affecting both urban and rural communities.

Within the Borough almost 25,000 people live in areas within the most deprived 10 per cent in England, 15 per cent of households have an annual income under £15,000 per year and over 9,000 children live in poverty. There is also an unacceptable gap in life expectancy between those people living in the most deprived neighbourhoods compared with the most affluent areas. In Cheshire West and Chester this gap is almost a decade for men and almost 8 years for women.

Cheshire West and Chester Council facilitated two Poverty Truth Commissions held in 2017 and 2020 with the aim of tackling the root causes of poverty and addressing gaps in services across the borough.

Community Inspirers, volunteers with lived and living experience of poverty, shared their stories and the effect poverty had on them and their families. Through true listening and collaboration, members of the Commissions were able to reflect on how systems and process could better support local people.

'Sharing my story has made me feel empowered that my voice, as well all the other community inspirers, has been heard.' Antony -Community Inspirer

There have been a range of outcomes from the commissions including:

- More collaborative and effective partnership working and increased socio-economic inclusion awareness across a wide range of local organisations
 - Community Inspirers consistently reported a stronger sense of confidence, enabling them to have voice, secure employment, develop their learning, become more independent.
 - New support for front line staff to understand the story of the person in front of them, their challenges, stresses and often complex problems and the need for compassion, empathy, and making any difference they can, no matter how small. As a result, one social housing provider moved from a process-driven approach to offering a person-centred, wellbeing service which focuses on early intervention and supporting people to sustain tenancies and they are now reporting a 75 per cent reduction in evictions.
 - Improved access to food in schools, improved 'pick lists' at food banks.

Building on the learning from the Poverty Truth Commissions, it was agreed in early 2020 to mainstream this approach to inform and support all poverty work across the Council and with local partner agencies, developing a programme of work that retains the ethos of putting people at the heart of policy development and service design.



In October 2020 the Council declared a poverty emergency setting poverty reduction alongside tackling climate change as the foundation for a fairer, greener recovery from

Covid-19. The declaration also established a commitment to work collaboratively with the academic community and to adopt a social justice approach to poverty.

'The coronavirus storm has been difficult for us all, but for people like me struggling to get by, it has been more difficult. We must remember, we are in the same storm, but not all in the same boat. In September I had my first visitor to sit and talk to me in 18 months. We must invest in systems that keep people afloat, not in policies that pull people under.' Gus - Community Inspirer

Following the declaration, a new 'Fairer Future Strategy 2022/32' has been co-produced with communities setting out an ambitious ten-year plan to reduce poverty. The strategy was developed based upon a comprehensive engagement exercise underpinned by the poverty truth philosophy of 'nothing about us without us is for us.'

The strategy underlines our commitment to hear the voices of people experiencing poverty and take action to address the issues they raise. It highlights the need to take urgent actions to alleviate the symptoms of poverty by working closely with communities and stakeholders to find local solutions to problems. This approach builds on the successful deployment of a £500k winter poverty fund which provided additional resources to voluntary and community groups to tackle winter poverty. Including £50k allocated towards a Tackling Poverty Crowdfunder to support local projects backed by communities with clear social benefits. The long-term ambition of the strategy is to address the underlying causes of poverty through economic transformation as part of the boroughwide approach to creating a more inclusive economy.

'Being involved as an Inspirer from the start of the Poverty Truth Commissions, I have witnessed first-hand what can be achieved with openness of minds - and the dedication of people from all sides to improve the lives of people in poverty. What has already been achieved is far more than we could ever have dreamed of in those early days. The Fairer Future strategy is the culmination of all the hard work of those involved - and going forward with the dedicated people we have and the resources they bring with them we have the tools to achieve much, much, more and have a golden opportunity to change many more lives.' Barbara, Community Inspirer

For further information contact:

Catherine Fletcher

Strategy and Innovation Manager – Cheshire West and Chester Council

Catherine.fletcher@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk | www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk