



# Co-operative Councils

## Innovation Network

### POVERTY



## South Tyneside Council

### Tackling Poverty in South Tyneside

With a quarter of its residents living in the most deprived ten per cent of England, poverty has been on the radar of councillors in South Tyneside since long before the cost-of-living crisis.

In 2019 the People Select Committee started an in-depth investigation to ensure the Council was doing all it could to help people escape poverty while supporting those in difficult circumstances. The work of the Poverty Commission work led to the creation of the multi-agency South Tyneside Poverty Group which has helped coordinate the cost-of-living response and consider longer term interventions.

A recognition that no one organisation can deal with the magnitude of the issue has meant that partnership working is at the very heart of the approach. Last year a second Anti-Poverty Summit was held, involving 99 attendees from 36 organisations.

A number of key themes emerged from the Summit. Continuing to put local people with lived experience of poverty at the heart of decision-making is key, particularly through the Poverty Truth Commission, while providing simple and easily accessible information to residents is also vital. Other themes included working with employers to reduce in-work poverty and enhanced collaboration on funding bids.

Since the Summit, a clear set of action points have been drawn together to set the direction of the ongoing programme.

Attendees agreed that the network of Welcoming Places should continue to be supported to access funding. Almost 70 spaces in places such as churches, Council buildings and charities were found to be making a real difference to local residents when independently evaluated. Training and skills provision will be offered in key community settings – including Welcoming Places - to allow people to access basic skills and a wide range of accredited training opportunities.

A range of actions were launched to protect those most at risk over the winter with 'Winter Readiness Cards' produced to enable front-line workers to signpost those in need of support. A benefits advisor visited key community venues while families entitled to universal benefits related free school meals received food vouchers over the Christmas holiday period.

Work continues with a range of partners on raising awareness of and maximising benefits. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme has been reviewed to make it more proportionate and target it at those that need the most support, as well as continuing to help care experienced young people. The new scheme complements the work of the Welfare Support Team and Local Welfare Provision by benefiting around 10,000 households through Council Tax bill reductions of, on average, 60 per cent.



Cllr Paul Dean, Lead Member for the Voluntary Sector, Partnerships and Equalities, is pictured with Laura Liddell

The Council is also using the South Tyneside Pledge to work with local businesses to reduce in-work poverty. More than 250 businesses have now signed up to the Pledge which aims to boost local economic activity, reduce health inequalities, cut carbon emissions, and enhance civic pride by spending, recruiting from and supporting the local area. A campaign has been launched to boost the awareness of local businesses around health and work, including benefits. Information has also been given to pledgees on the period poverty scheme which encourages employees to support those in dire financial straits by donating sanitary items,

while links have also been made with voluntary organisations and pledgees to see how they can work together. Officers are also exploring the potential to carry out an audit on in-work poverty, as well as looking at the feasibility of adopting the Real Living Wage and how both could be rolled out to wider partners.

An Anti-Poverty Strategy Co-ordinator is co-ordinating all the anti-poverty work being carried out by the Council, the South Tyneside Poverty Group and associated groups and has led on the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy which will further shape the direction of work and feed into the new North East Combined Authority. Work is underway to look at how best to share information with partners while a working group has also been formed to explore free school meals auto-enrolment.

While it is clear that a huge amount of work is going on to alleviate poverty in South Tyneside, it must be recognised that most of the levers to action real change are in the control of central government. It is, therefore, vital that there is continued lobbying to highlight the impact of poverty and the resources needed to alleviate it. One example of this is the combined lobbying with the North East Child Poverty Commission and the Local Government Association for the continuation of the Household Support Fund.

Despite the challenges, a determination and willingness to work in partnership is key to the response in South Tyneside. It is only by working together that so much has already been achieved for those in dire financial circumstances. From improving access to financial support and affordable nutritious food to tackling health inequalities linked to poverty to ensuring high quality careers advice is available to all, there is an unwavering commitment from all involved to tackle the unprecedented level of poverty in the Borough. It is that co-operative approach that sets South Tyneside apart and has enabled so much to be done for those most in need of support.

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