



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Anti-Poverty Strategy

2022-2025



“Our vision is for a **fairer and **more inclusive** West Northamptonshire, where everyone is able to live their best life, prosperous and fulfilling, free from poverty and inequality.”**

Foreword

Cllr Matt Golby

Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health



West Northants is a great place to live, with a wonderful blend of rural towns and villages mixed with our larger urban centres.

It is a place of heritage, open spaces, leisure opportunities and many strong established businesses, a place that has many strengths, and attractions for investors, new business and visitors.

A place that has had past challenges, and like all areas now facing some uncertainty as we emerge from the recent pandemic, which has amplified many of the inequalities that existed across our communities in West Northamptonshire. It has led to an increased need for services from the Council and partners who have been working hard to find ways to maintain and increase support for those facing hardship.

We know that there will be an increase in people who will be experiencing poverty as we emerge from the pandemic and for those in poverty prior to the pandemic we recognise they are most likely to be struggling even more.

West Northamptonshire's Anti-Poverty Strategy provides a framework for how we intend to tackle poverty, which can impact upon many different people in many different circumstances, prevent people from reaching their potential and can have a negative effect on people's health and wellbeing.

It is important that we do what we can to respond to poverty among all sections of our community and prevent people falling into poverty in the first place.

Poverty prevention and lifting people out of poverty is at the heart of the strategy. The emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic in West Northants has been unprecedented and there has been an immense collective response from

partners, voluntary organisations, community groups and residents who have supported the most vulnerable individuals in our communities, at a time when they have needed it the most. The engagement and dedication from everyone involved has been truly inspiring. In addition to helping those who are already struggling, we must look to prevent people from falling into poverty in the first place and this sets the direction for our strategy.

We recognise that those experiencing poverty are best placed to understand what their needs are and how to respond to them. We also, as a collective, recognised from the outset that the development of the strategy transcends politics.

We have worked in a way that we haven't before, across our political parties towards a vision that we all aspire to. We have listened to our residents, voluntary organisations, community groups and partners who have made clear, that there is much we can do by sharing our resources, and promoting a range of support. Feedback has been clear about making sure we tailor our activities to suit both the rural and the urban pressures that low income households face.

Running alongside the strategy, we have commissioned a West Northants Poverty Truth Commission, engaging those with lived experience. These voices will shape our strategic direction and help deliver and drive our actions.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer our thanks to all those involved in the development of the strategy, including Salford City Council, who have shared their journey and the lessons they have learned along the way, allowing us insight to frame our strategy to deliver the best outcomes for our communities.

I look forward to working with you to ensure its effective implementation, to enable everyone in West Northamptonshire to live their best life.



I am proud to have been part of this process and I am pleased that we have, whilst considering all options, maintained our desire to achieve real change and implement a strategy that can deliver results. Work should be the route out of poverty. More than half of people in poverty now live in a working family.

We must recognise that. Delivery of this strategy won't happen by accident and will take leadership, vision and ambition with social values at the heart of the continued work we do.

I look forward to working with everyone on that delivery and demonstrating our commitment to inclusive growth for the people of West Northamptonshire. I would like to thank everyone who has got us this far.

Cllr Emma Roberts
Labour Group Deputy Leader
Delapre & Rushmere

Oversight Strategy Development Group



what do we mean when we talk about poverty?

The definition of poverty “the state of being extremely poor”, does not reflect the impact of poverty on all aspects of an individual’s and family’s life. West Northants has adopted the Joseph Rowntree Foundation definition of poverty, and the Child Poverty Action Group definition, as these address not only the lacking sufficient money aspect of poverty, but goes further by defining what being “extremely poor” actually means to people.

Living in poverty has been defined as when a family has a total net income of less than 60% of the median income for their family type, after housing costs.

Our agreed definitions of Poverty:

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies in which they belong.

Source: Child Poverty Action Group

Poverty means not being able to heat your home, pay your rent, or purchase the essentials for your children. It means waking up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty, and impossible decisions about money.

Source: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Poverty has wide ranging impacts. Being in poverty can mean that basic material resources are lacking and can lead to people living in poor quality housing, or not having a home. It can also lead to missed opportunities, exclusion and even stigma and discrimination. If people are prevented from accessing resources and experiences, it limits their ability to participate and feel valued and included in society.

Risk and vulnerability

The places where people live and the circumstances into which they are born have a fundamental effect on life chances. People may be considered to be living in poverty if they lack the financial resources to meet their needs, whereas people can be regarded as deprived if they lack any kind of resources, not just income. One in five (22%) people nationally are living in poverty.

Although this strategy is aimed at reducing poverty for people of all ages and personal circumstances, there are certain groups that face a much higher risk of living in poverty than others. This strategy will seek to reflect the needs of these vulnerable people and disadvantaged communities most at risk of poverty.

We recognise that some of the data sets are a number of years old, however the data that has been used is the most current information that is available.

As newer data becomes available, it will be utilised to further develop the strategy and action plans.



Childhood Poverty

Child poverty is increasing, in 2019 13.9% (10,231) of children were living in poverty in West Northants (this is lower than England, 17.%).

Childhood poverty has knock on effects for later life; Poverty can result in poor educational outcomes for children, bring shame and stigma, can lead to crime and disorder, health problems, drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, child abuse and neglect and family breakdown. These risks can be passed down through the generations in a vicious cycle. Evidence suggests that childhood poverty increases the likelihood of being out of work as an adult.

In 2020/21 79% (4,961) of children in Northamptonshire achieved a good level of development at 2-2.5 years, which is lower than England (82.9%).²

In 2019, 81% of 5 year olds in Northamptonshire achieved 'expected level' on communication early learning goals, 72.9% of 5 year olds achieved 'expected level' in literacy early learning goals and 78% of 5 year olds achieved 'expected level' on maths early learning goals.³

In 2019/20, the percentage of young people achieving GCSEs (and equivalent qualifications) in English and Maths by age 19 was 65.6% in Daventry, 63.2% in Northampton and 76.5% in South Northants.⁴



Lone parents, large families, carers and care leavers

Lone parents, large families, carers and care leavers are more likely to experience poverty than people without children or caring responsibilities. Extra costs such as childcare or the loss of income from the need to reduce working hours are particularly significant drivers.

These groups are also more likely to be in low paid jobs and have high unemployment rates. Furthermore, they have been more affected by squeezes in housing costs. Lone parents are nearly twice as likely to be in poverty than any other group, and they are twice as likely to live in persistent poverty (being in poverty in the current year as well as at least two out of three of the previous years). Many young people leaving care also face particular challenges, as they often find it difficult to secure employment or work experience opportunities and often lack the confidence to access public services.

In 2021 17.5% of Northants residents responding to a GP patient survey had a caring responsibility.⁵

A Carers Joint Strategic Needs Assessment in 2020 estimated that there were approximately 40,000 carers in West Northants.⁶

Women

Women are more likely to experience persistent poverty. More than one fifth of women (22%) have a persistent low income, compared to approximately 14% of men. Living in persistent poverty denies women the opportunity to build up savings and assets to fall back on in times of hardship. This effect accumulates for older women which can result in extensive poverty.

Some of the contributing factors include lower pay, part-time work; higher rates of unemployment and economic inactivity; likelihood of being a single parent.

Nine out of ten lone parents are women. The median gross weekly pay for male single parents is £346, while for female single parents it is £194.40.⁸



People with a disability or suffering ill health

Families with at least one disabled person are more likely to live in poverty.

Adults with disabilities are also more likely to be in poverty than those who are not disabled, and this has increased in the past five years.

In 2021 53.1% of Northants residents responding to a GP survey had a long-term condition.⁹ Applied to the local adult population this would equate to 164,800 people.

In 2020/21 11% of GP patients responding to the GP patient survey had a long-term mental health problem, which equates to 34,203 people.

Older people

Low income in retirement is often linked to earlier low pay, or time out of employment. Many older people are also missing out on the entitlements they are due to lack of knowledge or assumptions that they are not entitled. While pensioner poverty rates have fallen in recent years, with an ageing population action is required to ensure that progress is maintained.

In 2019 10.8% (9,398) of older people in West Northants were living in deprivation.¹⁰

This is lower than England (14.2%). In 2011, 29.4% (16,407) of older people in West Northants were living alone.¹¹

(this data is from the last census and will be updated when the 2021 data becomes available in Summer 2022).

Some ethnic minority groups

Certain ethnic groups experience higher levels of poverty as a result of a number of factors such as higher levels of unemployment, poorer housing and low take up of and access to services.

According to the 2011 Census (data from 2021 is due to be released later this year) there were 375,101 residents and 89.8% of those classed themselves as White British. 5.1% of residents were born outside the British Isles, with 2.7% born outside the EU.

The most common non-British Isles countries for residents to have been born in are Poland and India.¹² 93.4% of people living in West Northamptonshire speak English. The other top languages spoken are 1.8% Polish, 0.5% Bengali, 0.3% Romanian, 0.3% Lithuanian, 0.3% Gujarati, 0.2% Russian, 0.2% Chinese.¹³

No recourse to public funds - As a condition of their visa, most categories of migrants in the UK have no recourse to public funds, meaning that they and their children are unable to claim benefits. Undocumented migrants and people whose immigration status is insecure are also unable to claim benefits. The Children's Society has estimated that more than 1.4 million people have NRPF, including nearly 175,000 children (UK).

National Citizens Advice research suggests:

People with NRPF are four times more likely to be behind on at least one essential bill (81% against 20% for the UK population) with rent, utilities and council tax the most common bills missed.

Almost half (48%) report living in overcrowded accommodation and 1 in 5 (18%) have experienced homelessness or housing insecurity.

Three-quarters (75%) have suffered from at least one negative consequence of having NRPF, including not being able to feed themselves or their family, or afford clothing and footwear appropriate for the weather.

1 in 4 (23%) already can't afford to heat their homes. With big price rises now kicking in for fuel bills, many more are likely to face impossible choices this winter.

In-work poverty

Whilst it is true that unemployment remains a key factor, poverty amongst working people in the UK has risen significantly. In-work poverty has risen to 56% of people in poverty. The increase of in-work poverty has ever been experienced by families where all adults work full time within the household.



Some people living in higher working households comprised 17% of people living in poverty in 2018/19, compared to 14% 10 years earlier and 9% in 1996/97.

People living in lower work intensity households comprised 47% of people living in poverty in 2018/19, compared to 42% 10 years earlier and 35% in 1996/97.¹⁷

Unemployed

The number of people unemployed in West Northamptonshire in 2020 was 10,000.¹⁴

In 2020/21 41,400 people were economically inactive¹⁵

In 2019/20 5,415 were claiming unemployment benefit¹⁶ and 779 were long-term unemployed.

Being in a working family (especially one where there is a full-time worker and all adults are in work) reduces the risk of being in poverty, and this will be supported by recent changes to the benefits system. It is by no means a guarantee, especially if that work is part-time or in self-employment, a low-paying sector or if there is a single earner in the household. Around a third of working-age adults in families where there is only part-time work are in poverty, as are almost a quarter of people working in the administrative and support service sector.

Poverty in West Northamptonshire

In 2019 9.6% (37,318) people in West Northants were living in income deprivation. This is lower than England (12.9%.) However, Citizen's Advice have suggested that deprivation data does not give the full picture.

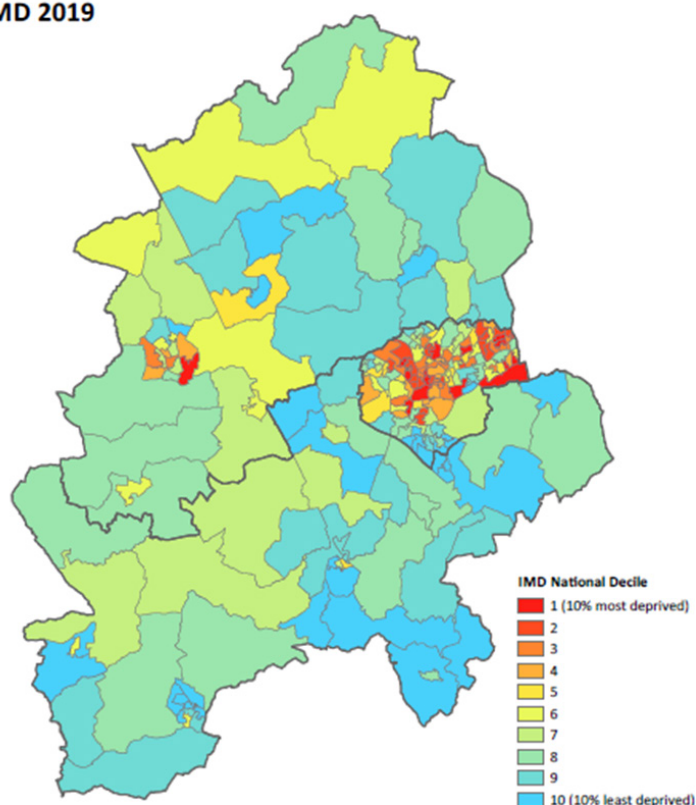
They have found that 30% of people accessing their services live in the most deprived areas, but 72% of people accessing their service are living below the poverty line. Over half of those living in poverty live in working households, where work does not provide enough income to meet basic needs or people fall into poverty due to circumstances beyond their control.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is the official measure of relative deprivation in England and is part of a suite of outputs that form the Indices of Deprivation (IoD).

It follows an established methodological framework in broadly defining deprivation to encompass a wide range of an individual's living conditions.

- The IMD shows that 16.9% of the population of West Northamptonshire live in the 20% most deprived areas (LSOA).
- The area with the highest proportion of residents living in the top 20% deprived areas is Northampton (28.2%).

West Northamptonshire
IMD 2019



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Table 1: The LSOA areas in the most deprived decile on IMD

Local Authority District name (2019)	IMD Rank	Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Decile	LSOA Name
Northampton	185	1	Billing Aquadrome, Bellinge- Fieldmill Road
Northampton	1,139	1	Briar Hill- Ringway, Southwood Hill
Northampton	1,372	1	St James' End- St James Retail Park, Black Lion Hill, St Peter's Way, Drapery
Northampton	1,398	1	Kingsheath- Park Drive, West Oval
Northampton	1,520	1	Dallington Road, Merthyr Road
Northampton	1,803	1	Blackthorn Primary School
Northampton	2,238	1	Eastfield park, Grange Road
Daventry	2,375	1	Borough Hill, Trafalgar Way
Northampton	2,420	1	Marriot Street, St George's Street, Deal Street, Sheep Street
Northampton	2,765	1	St Andrews Hospital, Rushmere Road
Northampton	2,963	1	Auckland Close, Kingsland Avenue, Whilton Road
Northampton	3,065	1	Ecton Brook Road, Pennycress Place
Northampton	3,246	1	Goldings/ Overstone Lodge/ Blackthorn

Causes of Poverty

The anti-poverty strategy recognises that the core aim is to address both the causes of poverty and its effects. We know that the variations of inequalities of health including education, housing and employment drives variations in outcomes for physical and mental health. These impact on an individual's inability to prevent sickness, or to take action and access treatment when ill health occurs. Therefore, whilst the core purpose of the strategy is to reduce poverty within West Northamptonshire communities, we recognise the need to look at access to activities and services which will improve health and wellbeing, to increase resilience in communities and prevent people from falling into poverty in the first place as well as addressing the impacts of poverty. This will add value and complement any established activity towards actively reducing poverty.

The causes and consequences of poverty are often complex. Analysis of the available evidence suggests that there is no single cause, but a range of factors contribute to people's risk of experiencing poverty. Over half of those living in poverty live in working households, where work does not provide enough income to meet basic needs or people fall into poverty due to circumstances beyond their control. In the past twenty years poverty rates have fallen.

However, since 2013 previous reductions in poverty among families have gone into reverse. This is largely due to rises in housing, food and fuel prices increasing the cost of living.

In 2019 11.8% (15,192) people in West Northants were in fuel poverty¹⁹



Unemployment and low pay

There is still a strong association between unemployment and poverty, along with a significant rise of in-work poverty.

Young people are particularly impacted, with the number aged 16 to 18 not in employment, education or training increasing.

In 2019 3.5% of 16-17 year olds in Northamptonshire were not in education, employment or training (NEET)²⁰

Although getting more local people into good quality work will undoubtedly play a major role in tackling poverty, it must be acknowledged that even when people do work it is not always a guaranteed route out of poverty. Low pay and low wage growth continues to be a key cause of poverty, we have seen a significant rise in part-time contracts.

In 2021 gross median weekly pay in West Northants was £515.30 and in 2019 the gross value added per hour worked was £31.46.

Lack of skills and qualifications

Job opportunities for those with few qualifications are limited and austerity and the COVID pandemic has meant that there are fewer resources to tackle poverty, adversely affecting those worse off.

In 2020 11,900 people aged 16 - 64 (4.8%) had no qualifications, which is lower than the national average (6.4%).²¹

In 2019/20 the percentage of young people achieving GCSEs (and equivalent qualifications) in English and Maths by age 19 was 65.6% in Daventry, 63.2% in Northampton and 76.5% in South Northants.²²



Household debt

National figures suggest that there are around 8.3 million people in the UK who are unable to pay their bills and around 22% of UK adults have less than £100 in savings.

Renters, young people, lone parents and those with three or more children are most likely to be affected, and this often compounded by the recovery charges associated with paying off those debts.

More and more families are having to borrow to support their day-to-day living standards.

Poor physical and mental health

The link between poverty and a higher risk of illness and premature death is well established.

Poverty leads to feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, and impacts on people's attitudes towards the future. It can result in unhealthy choices, such as smoking and using drugs or alcohol, which may be used to cope with daily stresses and prevents people from being able to invest in their future.

All of these factors can have a significant impact on mental and physical health, and lead to health inequalities.

In Northamptonshire in the period 2018–20 life expectancy at birth was 79.8 for males and 82.8 for females²³ and in 2017-19 healthy life expectancy was 63.4 for males and 63.6 for females.²⁴

In the period 2017-19 the gap in life expectancy between people living in the most and least deprived parts of Northamptonshire was 8.8 years for males and 7.1 years for females.²⁵

We know there is a strong link between poverty and poor mental health

In Northamptonshire in 2018/19: 6% reported a low happiness score²⁶ and 18.1% reported a high anxiety score.²⁷

In 2020/21 14.3% (88,642) of GP registered patients had depression recorded in their record and 11% of those responding to the annual GP survey had a long-term mental health problem.²⁸

High housing and living costs

High housing and living costs constitute one of the most direct impacts on poverty and material deprivation. Rising house prices, rents in the private sector and interest rates are pushing more renters and homeowners below the poverty line and increasing demand for lower cost housing, for example, social housing. The [West Northamptonshire Council, Housing and Economic Needs Assessment, 2021](#) shows that 1,253 new affordable rented homes are needed in West Northants each year, between 2020-2050.

Since 2017, West Northamptonshire has seen the number of people presenting as homeless increase (from 983 to 2059). The high cost of housing is not the only problem. The rising cost for other basic necessities such as food, clothing and utilities, coupled with weak wage growth, means more and more families are reaching crisis point. In addition, many of those on low incomes are also forced to pay over the odds for some essential goods and services (known as the Poverty Premium) including energy, finance, furniture and white goods. Estimates suggest that the poverty premium can amount to £490 a year, but sometimes can be as high as £2,250. The type of fuel tariff low income households are on contributes the most to the poverty premium.

The table below shows the initial estimate of the number of households with a current housing need. These figures are before any 'affordability test' has been applied to assess the ability of households to meet their own housing needs and has been termed 'the number of households in unsuitable housing'. Overall, the analysis estimates that there are currently just over 12,049 households living in unsuitable housing (or without housing) in West Northamptonshire.

Table 2: Estimated Number of Households Living in Unsuitable Housing ²⁹

	Homeless/ concealed households	Households in over-crowding	Existing affordable housing tenants in need	Households from other tenures in need
Daventry	317	623	100	682
Northampton	1,346	4,763	341	2,282
South Northants	304	475	79	737
West Northants	1,967	5,861	520	3,701

The figures presented are estimates and may include an element of double counting as households could fall within more than one category.

Lived Experience

In addition to the data, it is important that we listen and learn from the lived experiences of people in poverty; that we engage with those with first-hand knowledge. To inform the development of the strategy we have sought evidence from local voluntary and community organisations, along with key front-line services who are directly supporting West Northants' most vulnerable people.

The Strategy has been coproduced in consultation and discussion with partners, cross party elected members, service providers, public health, housing and voluntary and community representatives, including the VCSE Assembly. An Oversight Board was established comprising these partners to develop the framework and shape the strategy.

The strategy will be kept under regular review as new evidence and learning emerges from the impact of the pandemic and we continue to be informed by the findings of the West Northants Poverty Truth Commission.

The Poverty Truth Commission has provided the opportunity to listen and learn from the lived experiences of people in poverty. A website has been set up for the Poverty Truth Commission in West Northants poverty-truth.org.uk which is encouraging real life stories, from those with lived experienced of poverty. These case studies are coming from seldom heard groups within our communities, those that are vulnerable and those most in need.

The Hope Centre, working with other organisations and community groups, conducted research with specific groups affected by poverty, capturing lived experience, providing the opportunity to feed into the strategy.

The engagement and activity that is driven through the Poverty Truth Commission and the work of The Hope Centre and partners has helped to define what poverty means in West Northamptonshire. The Poverty Truth Commission will continue to develop the strategic objectives and commitments.

The close involvement of our communities in shaping our approach will ensure that we are meeting the differing needs in all of the communities of West Northamptonshire to ensure those who experience poverty first-hand remain at the heart of what we do.

Live Your Best Life

In West Northants we want children and adults to have every opportunity to live their best life. Living your best life for us means people have equality of opportunity to be the best version of themselves. To be the best version of themselves we recognise that people need;

- The best start in life.
- Access to the best available education and learning.
- Opportunity to be fit, well and independent.
- Employment that keeps them and their families out of poverty.
- Housing that is affordable, safe and sustainable in places which are clean and green.
- To feel safe in their homes and when out and about.
- Connected to their families and friends
- The chance for a fresh start, when things go wrong.
- Access to health and social care when they need it.
- To be accepted and valued simply for who they are.

To support our residents with these 10 domains means that we have to collaborate, not just with our partners and local business but also with local people to ensure we understand the uniqueness of each of our Neighbourhoods and the people who live in them. Understanding this uniqueness enables us to ensure the right support, environment and interventions are in place to support people to live their best life.

This strategy will provide a significant contribution to enable people to live their best life and does not intend to duplicate any of the work that is already underway but, seeks to add value, align, enhance, and support delivery. The Health and Wellbeing Board will ensure this strategy and its implementation contributes to our overall approach and will provide an annual report to West Northants Council detailing progress and outcomes delivered for local people.

What are we going to do?

To achieve our vision we must work together to maximise our resources and focus on activities that are likely to have a lasting impact on reducing poverty across West Northants, to improve the lives of our local communities. We will do this by focusing on three key priorities:

- 1 Supporting people who are struggling in poverty now**
- 2 Preventing people from falling into poverty in the first place**
- 3 Continue to influence the Government and other national organisations to get a better deal for the communities in West Northants.**

These in turn are supported by 8 strategic objectives and 32 commitments, high level ambition statements that collectively support the shared vision and are aligned to the 3 priorities. Our vision, priorities and shared commitment statements map our strategic direction. We are clear that this is the start of our journey, identifying our commitments against what we know now and recognising we still have a long way to go.

Through continued engagement of our community, partners, local businesses and community and voluntary sector organisations we will develop a robust set of action plans and a performance framework which will underpin the strategy.

Supporting people who are struggling in poverty now

As clearly demonstrated, levels of poverty remain unacceptably high. It is for us all - public sector, businesses, the voluntary and community sector, communities and individuals to come together to provide better support for those who are struggling, and those who are in poverty now.

Commitment of resource and funding - to deliver the strategy and resultant action plan, with a focus on those most in need

To really make a difference there is a need for effective support services that reach beyond the public sector, at an organisational and individual level. These organisations are also faced with their own challenges of rising demand and reducing resources.

We will:

- Work to map existing resources and services to understand the need and identify gaps across West Northants to drive our actions.
- Work with partners and communities across West Northants to develop a better understanding of the characteristics and experiences of those most in need; the different types of poverty that most affects them; and how we can work together to provide more tailored support when needed.
- Continue to provide appropriate funding to the relevant voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations working across West Northants who provide critical support for those in severe hardship, measuring outcomes and effectiveness of investment.
- Provide more targeted support to those most in need, our high risk groups experiencing severe hardship.

Improve communication and awareness of information and support for those who are in need

This strategy is designed to help bring about change and improve the lives of all people on low incomes, regardless of personal circumstances, across the whole of West Northants.

We will:

- Develop a communication and engagement strategy that ensures we target specific communities, those most at risk and most in need as identified within the strategy.
- Ensure all our residents are aware of the services available to support them and have access to these services when they are in need.

Increase access to affordable credit, free welfare advice and debt advice

Free and independent advice services play a hugely important role in the fight against poverty.

We will:

- Continue to invest in necessary free and independent advice services; front line services, providing vital support to help maximise people's incomes and ensure everyone understands their rights and legal entitlements.
- Work with providers of welfare rights and debt advice reviewing the way these are delivered to ensure more people are able to access the free and independent advice they need.
- Enhance the awareness of affordable credit and savings options to those excluded from mainstream banking; ensuring more people can benefit from cheaper lending and a convenient way of saving regularly.
- Review the Council's debt collection practices (including the use of external enforcement agencies), so that they are undertaken in as sensitive a manner as possible, and in a way that does not create further hardship or financial difficulties for vulnerable people.

Preventing people from falling into poverty in the first place

As well as taking action to alleviate some of the causes of poverty in the short term, we must work collectively to address many of the underlying causes of poverty to prevent people from falling into poverty in the first place. We will seek to do this by:

Helping people on low incomes to maximise their income and minimise their costs

West Northants continues to have fantastic growth potential and our Local Plan sets out clear frameworks for attracting investment and delivering new jobs and opportunities over the coming years. It is essential that local people are given opportunities generated through economic growth and we use our influence to target employers who offer local jobs, pay well and treat their employees well.

Commitments:

- The Council has recently agreed to a pay award for all directly employed staff, which is above the current real living wage
- A commitment to encourage businesses and organisations based in West Northants to pay all their staff the living wage.
- Support benefit claimants to receive their full entitlement to all benefits.
- Promote social mobility, by raising skills and improving access to a range of employment opportunities for people on low incomes, including apprenticeships and adult education.

Meet housing need with good quality social housing and enable the private rented sector to be an effective housing contributor

We have an absolute commitment to preventing homelessness in West Northants and providing alternative housing options, wherever possible, to avoid the need for people to make a homeless application and face the prospect of living in temporary accommodation or on the streets.

It is clear we need lower cost rented and social housing in West Northants to support the existing and growing population.

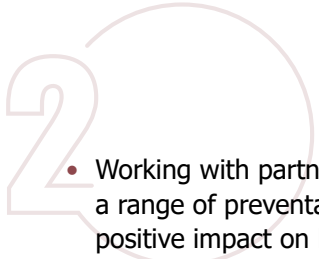
Commitments:

- Develop a new West Northants Housing Strategy.
- Support the development of new homes and ensure rent levels support local housing need.
- Support private tenants and landlords to improve energy efficiency standards of homes to help tenants and residents to reduce their energy costs.
- Develop a new West Northants Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- Help to prevent and reduce homelessness by seeking alternative housing options and increasing the number of good quality private sector homes available to rent.

Build resilient and supportive communities through investment in services that support health and social wellbeing, working in partnership with communities to develop local assets and build community resource

Commitments:

- We will listen to residents' views on local issues and work with communities to identify the solutions. We will seek to coordinate and facilitate community action to help address poverty.
- Work with partner organisations to develop area based approaches and multi-agency initiatives, supporting at a neighbourhood level where there are higher levels of poverty and discrimination.
- We will use an approach that recognises and builds on the strengths of individuals, families and communities. We will continue to build the relationship between public services and residents, communities and businesses that enables greater shared decision making and genuine co-production of services. We saw great examples of this during our response to COVID 19 and we need to ensure we continue to make full use of the assets, skills and resources that already exists within our diverse local areas.



- Working with partners across the system to provide a range of preventative services that can have a positive impact on health outcomes for low income residents and communities. Promoting healthy lifestyles and physical activity, including through the provision of leisure centres and providing access to green spaces, working with local voluntary groups and businesses to promote healthy eating and access to sustainable food.

- The Poverty Truth Commission has identified mental ill health as a particular area of concern. Working with those individuals and families with lived experiences of these issues, along with our health partners, we will explore ways we can better understand the relationship between poverty and mental health, and seek to better support the mental health and wellbeing of our most vulnerable.

Influencing the Government and other national organisations to get a better deal for the communities in West Northants

Whilst there is a lot of action that we can take locally to address poverty, many of the main drivers still lie with national government, which is why it is imperative that we influence the poverty debate at a regional and national level. Working together we must continue to do all we can to build the evidence base for change.

Engage members of parliament and central government departments, to advocate for equality and fairness to get the best deal for our communities

Commitments:

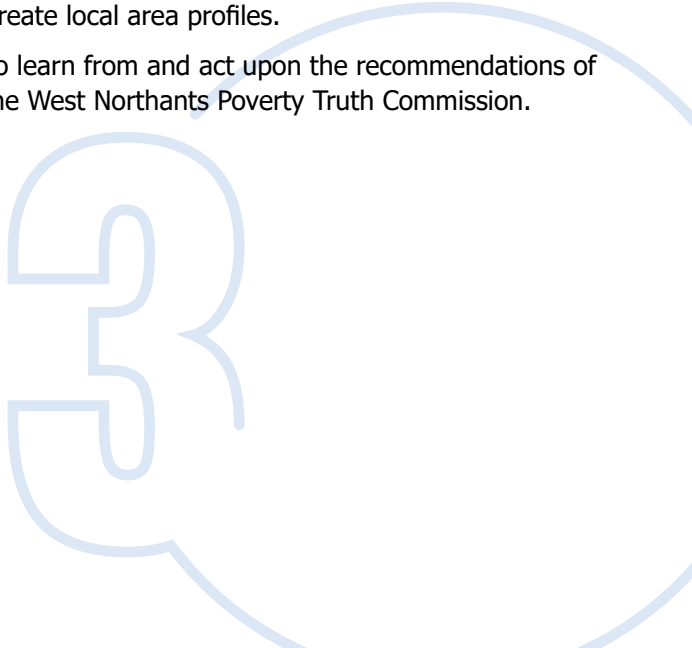
- Harness the appetite and continue to work together, as agencies, as partners, across political parties and across our communities.
- Continue the work of the oversight group which has helped to develop and shape the strategy so far.
- Building on the work that is already taking place at a national level, we will develop a campaign to highlight the hidden dangers of taking out short term, high cost credit and promote more responsible lending.

Utilise the evidence base for action and share this to lever in funds both locally and nationally

West Northants has a wealth of local data and intelligence on poverty and deprivation that has been used to inform the development of this strategy. We will continue to keep our knowledge base up to date and review in a timely fashion.

Commitments:

- Utilise organisations such as the University of Northampton to help provide high quality research, analysis and evaluation.
- Utilise local best practice, to learn and share and influence policy.
- Create local area profiles.
- To learn from and act upon the recommendations of the West Northants Poverty Truth Commission.



Measuring Success

The following outcomes will indicate we are making a difference. Our action plans will focus on those in greatest need and we will continue to collectively champion the cause of those who are most at risk.



A performance framework, which will include a set of performance indicators and a detailed action plan will be developed to measure the effectiveness of our strategy.

The performance indicators that will be used are those for which we have existing data sets available nationally or locally, collected by West Northants Council. We recognise that other partners and our community and voluntary sector have valuable data, which will provide a richer picture. Our intention is to use this information to help inform the future development of our strategy and drive our actions.

Case Studies

Rachel and Joleen's Story

For Rachel and Joleen, two young care leavers who agreed to share their experiences, poverty is about not having the resources (like money, food, or clothes) to cover their basic needs. "I think I realise it more now that I'm older", Rachel explained. "When you are young you don't really pay attention to stuff like that, until you get your own place. Then, it's a different story". "That's when you struggle", Joleen adds. "You think: I had this help when I was in foster care, but now what do I do? Who do I ask for help? I think you think about it more, and it makes you more appreciative of the things that you have now."

As Rachel and Joleen have received lasting support from the Leaving Care team, they expressed their gratitude and admitted how they would turn to them if they needed help. However, Rachel – who is not with Leaving Care anymore – acknowledged she no longer knows where else to get support from. "I wouldn't know what to do, no. I wouldn't know what to do to get out of this situation." She alluded to the abrupt transition into independent living and what a daunting and overwhelming experience it was. "It's the shock when you leave Leaving Care for me. I was 21, I didn't know what was going on, or what to do, or anything, and then it went downhill from there".

Over time, Rachel and Joleen have gradually gained more confidence to ask for help, but it is not without its challenges as they still struggle to receive the support they need. When reflecting on her experiences contacting services for support, Joleen explained: "You wait there (on the phone) for an hour, and they say 'call back tomorrow'. You could ring in the morning and it's still a 45-minute wait". "It's finding the courage to ask for help, then finding it, then waiting through it", said Rachel. "It's frustrating, and it just makes you want to give up. But you've got to persist".

For Joleen and Rachel poverty is a full circle – a cycle with barriers that stop them from escaping from it. "We were talking earlier about driving lessons. Obviously, if a young care leaver was able to experience learning to drive and then buying a vehicle, the opportunities for employment expand. But it's not easy to be able to do driving lessons and buying our own car, so we don't have an opportunity of a bigger, wider range of employment. So even if we were to get a job, we'd have to find out how to travel there", they add. "How are we even going to afford to travel there? It's just things like that, and it goes round."

Lorraine's Perspective on Poverty

Lorraine is a working mother, grandmother and student who recently shared her story on how she is struggling with debt and financial distress. For her, living in poverty means not having enough to pay her bills and the cost of essentials, like food or heating. Although her understanding of what poverty means has remained pretty much the same over time, she got angrier about it over the years when she realised she was stuck in the same position.

With her debts, Lorraine feels that outside her family, there are not enough places for her to go get help. She contacted Citizen's Advice, and she is now in a 60-day breathing space which gives her temporary protection from her debtors and bailiff action. Lorraine has already struggled with council tax bailiffs in the past – not because she does not want to pay it, she explained, but because she can't afford to pay it. "You start off with a debt that I think it was £1,600, but now is £2,300, because every time a bailiff comes, you get £200 put on top. And you have to, obviously, not answer your door, because... it's all been very stressful."

Lorraine is nearly finished with her master's degree, which she started soon after completing her first degree in International Relations and Politics. Nevertheless, as a student Lorraine has been suffering the stress of having to continually switch between universal credit and her student loan. She expressed how, as a result, there were periods of time when she could not claim any benefits. "In that time, I think it was the September when I started uni, until January, I had been entitled to absolutely zero. And now I owe them over £1,000. Then this is how people get in debt."

Even though Lorraine hopes getting these degrees will help her secure a better job, she is not oblivious to the barriers that stand in her way out of poverty, one of them being her age: "I'm going to be 60, so I may not be most employers first choice, because of my age". Lorraine added: "I wish I had gone to university years ago, but you get stuck in that trap – you're so busy spending your whole life concentrating on how you're going to live, that you forget maybe there's something you can do about it. It's just a constant loop you get stuck in."

Lorraine also reflected on how difficult it is for people and families to break the cycle of poverty. "If I get a better job, it will change for me. But all these people that are in world wage, they can't all go out and go get degrees and get better jobs. It doesn't work like that, because there are not enough jobs anyway. Who would do the jobs that people look down on if everyone got out and tried to do better? People should be paid for the value of their work – a cleaner is valuable, but they don't treat it like that", she says. "There should be a minimum wage and it should be enough that people can live on, and if they go out to work, they should be able to live on it. Have enough to pay their bills, to eat and everything, and have a little bit leftover. Everyone should have that."

Case Studies

Case Study F

F is originally from Kenya. She is 68 years old and has been in the UK for 19 years and has no recourse to public funds. She is married to a British national who is 67. Neither of them works, and although he is on a state pension, they find it hard to make ends meet. "We don't have enough money to buy washing salts, food, clothing".

When she first came to this country, in 2002, she worked in care, for private agencies. She paid tax with a fake ID, which she paid £200 for. From the money she was paid, she remitted money back to Kenya regularly, to support her children and family there.

"I used to have good weekly money. "At that time I was even supporting in the house, I had everything" In 2015, she had to stop work, due to ill health. "Now I can't stand for long, I can't lift, so I can't work." To make end meets, F has been doing cash-for-work jobs for community, mostly childminding, for which parents pay cash-in-hand. F has also taken on domestic, housekeeping work, as and when it has been available. For a period, she was doing ironing for cash, earning £20 for 5 or 6 hours work. "They don't pay good money"

F is an overstayer. She has applied for settled status but has been refused 5 times. Each time she has applied, she had to find significant amounts of money. She has been badly advised, legally. The last time she tried was in 2018, when she was arrested on suspicion of forging her marriage certificate. She was remanded in custody and, after trial, was sentenced to 3 months and 2 weeks, had already been in for three months in Gloucester. She was released after three weeks, once they were satisfied that her marriage was genuine. She was told she would not be deported because of her ill health. She told us that someone wrote to her GP while she was in prison, to instruct him/her not to treat her. She has since been receiving support from Doctors of the World for all her medical needs, including the Covid vaccine.

"When you are not a citizen you don't get enough support from the surrounding, from the police, from the hospital, you don't get enough support because they learn that you are not allowed to be in this country, so they support you very little".



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