



THE FUTURE WE DESERVE: ROCHDALE BOROUGH'S ANTI- POVERTY STRATEGY 2024-2029

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The Supermarket Queue. Eileen Earnshaw (Rochdale Resident)

*One last look at the reduced to clear shelf
planning a meal from out- of - date sausage
strawberry yoghourts and cheap oven chips.
The supermarket queue grows longer and longer,
the coins in her pocket grow smaller and smaller.*

*Stacked by the checkout, packets of sweets,
£1 for one, buy two get one free.
The kids can both read, eyes fill with hope,
they don't say a word, they've been taught better,
they watch as she fingers the coins in her pocket.*

*Here's a fifty pence piece, there should be another.
Is this a ten or is it a two? With luck it's a ten.
Her finger-tips measure the size of the coins
sensitive now to the head of the queen
the rampant lion engraving.*

*No, don't risk it, stand in the queue, chin up
Try and look confident. Usher the kids through
the checkout soft handed. Half what she needs
but what can she do? She stands in the queue
her heart full of dread, a backbone so straight
it simulates steel.*

This poem was written by Eileen Earnshaw at a participatory Long Table event where those with “lived experience of poverty” were talking about their experiences. This Long Table event is just one of the ways in which Rochdale borough has chosen to listen deeply to residents to shape policy and strategy.

INTRODUCTION

In Rochdale, we believe in being compassionate towards one another and helping and protecting each other from harm. Yet, right now, many live in poverty. It cannot be right that many peoples' basic needs are not being met because of circumstances beyond their control.

Poverty is caused by the way our economy is designed – it's the result of decisions about what we should prioritise and how our resources should be distributed. Our economy creates powerful currents that pull people into poverty and make it very difficult for them to get out. For example, low-paid, unstable jobs mean more and more families are struggling to put food on the table.

It is our collective responsibility to ensure that people aren't being left behind and so we are taking steps through this strategy because we know that we can make a difference together.

Poverty can feel like a big, unsolvable and impossibly complex problem. But poverty is not inevitable and we can do something about it. That's why we are:

- a) Intervening early to prevent poverty from arising
- b) Acting to alleviate poverty wherever we find it
- c) Working to solve poverty once for all
- d) Doing all this in a collaborative and inclusive way

THE BIGGER PICTURE

If the way our economy is designed causes poverty, then it can be redesigned so that it's fairer and works for everyone. However, this requires joined-up solutions at multiple levels, from national governments to local communities. In addition to the actions set out in this strategy we, therefore, need to put pressure on the national government to make the structural changes needed to loosen the grip that poverty has over many residents across the borough.

OUR VISION

OUR VISION IS TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF RESIDENTS AND REDUCE THE UNFAIR AND UNACCEPTABLE IMPACT OF POVERTY SO THAT RESIDENTS CAN LIVE HAPPIER AND HEALTHIER LIVES. WE WILL CHALLENGE POVERTY WHEREVER WE FIND IT, AND ADVOCATE FOR THOSE WHOSE LIVES ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED BY IT. WITH COMPASSION, WE WILL CONTINUE TO WORK TOGETHER, TO CREATE A FAIRER AND MORE EQUAL BOROUGH. **THIS VISION WAS CO-PRODUCED BY PARTNERS FROM ACROSS THE SYSTEM WHO ARE TACKLING POVERTY IN THE BOROUGH AND THOSE WHO HAVE A LIVED EXPERIENCE OF IT.**

This strategy sets out our priorities for tackling poverty in the borough and the specific actions we will take. We know that tackling poverty is not easy: it requires a monumental system-wide effort driven by compassion and care.

We hope that this strategy makes it abundantly clear that poverty is unacceptable and is incompatible with our vision for the borough. We are committed to alleviating and, ultimately, eradicating poverty.

"THE COST OF LIVING GETS TALKED ABOUT LIKE IT'S SHORT TERM. YES IT IS A CRISIS, BUT ITS NOT LIKE IT'S QUICK AND SOMETHING YOU GET OVER. IT IS CALLED POVERTY AND IT SCARS FOR A LONG TIME AND IT'S NOT FAIR." RESIDENT, ROCHDALE BOROUGH

LINK TO WIDER WORK AND STRATEGIES

The People, Place and Planet Council Plan 2023 – 2028 sets out the strategic direction for the borough:

“We will not accept the inequalities that exist in the borough and the impact of the pandemic, rising costs and other events that are pushing more people to experience crisis, disadvantage and poor life chances”.

The Plan also states a clear ambition to *“empower our communities to improve their own lives and become resilient to life’s challenges by helping those in the hardest of circumstances get access to the basics and by creating opportunities for everyone to have good work, skills, housing, health, relationships and standards of living”.*

Action Together, Rochdale Borough’s VCFSE infrastructure organisation, states in their Strategy 2023-2028 that one of its key objectives is to *“facilitate action groups and networks that bring together diverse perspectives to address the root causes of poverty and inequalities”*

Both these plans make the tackling of poverty a central priority for us and underpin all objectives and actions laid out in this Anti-Poverty Strategy.

COST OF LIVING CRISIS

At the time of writing, high inflation and static wages have led to a cost-of-living crisis, resulting in large increases in the cost of housing, energy, food and other essential goods and services. In May 2022, a whole system group of people from different organisations led a series of urgent actions to tackling the crisis, including:

- A Warm Homes programme, which helped some of our most vulnerable residents to stay warm by providing fuel vouchers, fixing and replacing boilers, and distributing winter warmth packs, amongst a range of other interventions
- A network of warm spaces where local people could gather for free in a warm, safe, welcoming place and enjoy a free drink, activities and access to other services.
- Food vouchers for children on free school meals.
- Training for staff to increase their confidence and knowledge in order to better support residents.

As the cost of living crisis continues, we recognise that these types of interventions remain crucial. Indeed, this strategy commits us to maintaining this type of support. This strategy, however, also sets out a medium to long term plan for tackling poverty across the borough.

HOW WE DEFINE POVERTY

Poverty is complex and multi-faceted. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation describes poverty as, *“When a person’s resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation)”*. However, this is simply one definition amongst many. There is no single and universally accepted definition. Despite this complexity, in our

borough, we know that the impact of poverty is clear and unambiguous. Poverty restricts people's options, leaving them in impossible situations like choosing between heating and eating. It causes people to feel anxious, insecure and worried all the time. It means people face marginalisation and are deprived of the opportunity to fully take part in society.

"WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING TO TAKE THE SHAME OUT OF IT" WORKER TRYING TO TACKLE POVERTY IN ROCHDALE

One common way of establishing a baseline for poverty in any area is by using child poverty rates as a proxy measure. A child is considered to be growing up in poverty if they live in a household whose income is below 60% of the average (median) income for that year.

Recent statistics from the End Poverty Coalition estimate that child poverty has increased in Rochdale borough from 32.9% in 2014/15 to 40.5% in 2021/22.

In a rich country like ours, this is completely unacceptable; everyone should have enough money to meet their basic needs, which is why we are doing all we can to put things right with this strategy.

"WE LOVE OUR KIDS AND WE WANT TO PROVIDE FOR THEM. NOT HAVING ENOUGH TO MAKE ENDS MEET STOPS US FROM BEING THE MUMS WE COULD BE. IT'S LIKE THAT BIT OF US HAS BEEN STOLEN AWAY BY SOMEONE WE CAN'T SEE AND WILL NEVER KNOW. IT MAKES ME SO SCARED AND SAD WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT." MUM FROM ONE OF ROCHDALE CONNECTIONS TRUST'S SUPPORT GROUPS

WHAT CAUSES POVERTY?

Poverty is caused by political and human decisions about the way our economy is structured. Our economy locks people into poverty, making it very difficult for them to break free. This happens through:

Low-paid work and lack of work: Lack of opportunity or inequalities can cause people to be in a situation where they are unable to get suitable work or are trapped in low-paid work, part-time or insecure work, with unpredictable hours and incomes. Over time, this can lead them to fall into poverty. Circumstances can keep people in low-income jobs for a long time. This can be made worse as these jobs often have little potential for promotion, so incomes never sufficiently rise.

Lack of access to decent education or few opportunities to develop skills: Many adults in the borough have not been given enough support to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills, making it difficult for them to gain well-paid work. Likewise, there are not enough opportunities to develop the kinds of skills that will lead to high-paying jobs, especially computer skills.

An inadequate benefit and pension system: All of us rely on publicly funded services and support systems like education, roads, railways and the NHS. And our public services, such as our welfare system, are especially important to people who are struggling, such as our welfare system. Benefits are part of the solution to poverty and not the reason for it. But benefits can be hard to understand and access. For many, the benefits or pensions they receive are simply not enough to help them avoid poverty. Nor are they enough for them to

get out of poverty, and prevent those people who want to find good work from doing so. And there are levels of unclaimed benefits that are simply unacceptable. People in our borough are not accessing the welfare they are entitled to because they are unaware or unable to access the support they need.

Life circumstances: Changes in life circumstances can lead to poverty. For example, domestic violence and substance abuse can cause families to fall into poverty. People can become suddenly ill or be coping with long-term sickness and, therefore, unable to work. Children born into households in poverty are at a disadvantage because of a lack of resources and connections to wealth. This can lead to poverty being passed down the generations and long-standing poverty in geographic areas. There are also clear links between poverty, trauma, and adverse childhood experiences.

Rising costs: Living costs have been increasing at a faster rate than the average wage for several years. However, the cost of living crisis and rising inflation have dramatically accelerated this trend. The cost of housing, food, and household bills have risen in recent years, with other costs such as childcare costs also placing a strain on families' finances. This is not felt equally by all, with some people facing particularly high costs either due to where they live, increased needs - for example, due to ill health or disability - or because they are paying a "poverty premium" – the extra costs people on low incomes and in poverty pay for essential products and services.

We can loosen the grip that poverty has over people by changing these conditions. We know that many of these conditions are hard to change but we have a lot going for us in Rochdale borough. We have a cooperative community which is true to its values and principles and recognises and respects all members of the community. We have a culture of sharing and mutual support and are strong in our determination to try and stop things from getting worse for people.

"WEALTH MEANS, TO US, WHERE EVERYONE HAS A ROOF OVER THEIR HEADS, FULL BELLIES, SAFETY; AND KNOWING IT'S GOING TO STAY LIKE THAT" **COMMUNITY MEMBERS FROM ROCHDALE BOROUGH**

THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Being poorer than others has a profound long-term impact on health. This was shown by the work of Professor Marmot who found that as income and wealth increased so did health and wellbeing. This gradient not only existed when comparing rich people to poor people but also for those in between.

The relationship between poverty and health is complex and multi-directional. Poor physical or mental health and addictions can cause loss of income and poverty, and poverty can cause ill health. There are complex structural and policy issues which come into play in these circumstances too, which include the well-known inverse care law in which you find that more services are provided in wealthier areas even though the most need is in poorer areas.

YOU SAID

In February and March 2023, several Anti-Poverty Summit events took place. These events aimed to bring partners together with those people who have a lived experience of poverty. Through a mixture of deep listening, workshop events and action planning, we formulated a vision for alleviating poverty. We also asked participants what it was that they felt we should be focussing on in our anti-poverty work in the borough.

1. Work, Skills and Opportunity Making

“Ensure we have more well-paid jobs across the borough”

“Incentivise tech companies and encourage innovation”

“Tackle employers who exploit workers”

“Regulate employers to meet basic standards”

“Pay the real living wage and encourage local employers and council contractors to do the same”

“Helping those who have been out of work for a long time to build back up to it gradually so that it isn't too much”

“Offer more training and childcare so people can achieve more”

“More investment in training young people in skills and work and graduate students to be given experience in the field they have studied in”

2. Information, access to support and advice (including welfare benefits)

“Make sure people know where they can go to get help”

“Ensure help is available for everyone to get benefits advice to ensure they are getting all entitlements”

“Offer a wraparound service that includes help with food, debt advice, follow-up support, check-ups and not just leaving people to visit the food bank every week”

“Create partnership opportunities and share knowledge/data between organisations”

“Have workers that come from communities in Rochdale, making it easier to talk to someone like me: cultural sensitivity”

“Make sure we ensure help is available in different languages”

3. Housing

“Change the laws around landlords charging overpriced rent prices and exploiting people in houses not up to standard”

“Invest in housing stock. Have a mixed offer not just “affordable”

“Create decent affordable housing”

4. Systems change, Identity and Relationships

“We should try to help people out by befriending them so that we know exactly where the pain is hitting them”

“Make everyone feel loved and valued”

“Create more opportunities to talk - not just about needs. Celebrate achievements and bring communities together. Through this, understanding and acceptance will be fostered leading to support in a non-judgmental way.”

“Build a narrative that there is a route out and this isn't how it has to be”

“Don't label people as victims, encourage them to be the best version of themselves”

5. Helping Communities to Rise

“Help people enjoy the richness of community, green spaces, blue spaces and culture”

“Create community events that bring people together”

“Build the resilience of communities”

“Build a narrative about a circular economy, how one branch supports another”

“Regular events both for the public to attend and service providers to network with a common agenda”

“Invest in our communities through tangible things such as kids sports - helps increase aspirations and sense of community”

“Show people that poverty whilst being a lived experience does not need to remain a lived-in experience”

“Create opportunities for different groups. Include the elders and also young voices. Share experiences - listen to each other's stories.”

Co-produced projects

Two specific projects were suggested as part of the co-production work that took place at the summits.

Project One

There was concern about the lack of educational choice and career support for young people. A project was, therefore, suggested to provide more career support to young people at various locations like schools and communities, building on assets like Rochdale council's youth hub.

Project Two

It was felt that there were several unused buildings in the borough and a project was suggested to train young people in trades, by having them re-develop some of these unused buildings throughout the borough.

Some scoping work will take place as part of the Anti-Poverty Strategy implementation plan to investigate the feasibility of these projects

WHAT WE'RE ALREADY DOING

It's important to remember that there is work already happening across the borough trying to help people break free of poverty. This includes smaller VCFSE organisations, or individuals, who are working diligently to alleviate poverty in their local community. It also includes large borough-wide programmes from the council and other anchor institutions. We also recognise that there is a lot of work happening to tackle poverty that is not included in this strategy. For example, the work done by the council's Adult and Children's Services, or the many mutual support groups across the borough where residents support each other day in and day out. There are also countless individuals across the borough who look out for their neighbours and the people in their community. It's this sort of decency and compassion that helps to tackle poverty.

In addition, we need to honour and learn from what is already working, as well as identify where the gaps are. Some of the many examples of work that is already ongoing include:

1. Work, Skills and Opportunity Making

Rochdale Council's Work and Skills Single Access Point and drop-in sessions help raise aspirations for residents in the borough and provide ongoing support so people can have meaningful careers. There are also several specific programmes to help support those people who are furthest away from the labour market and a Youth Hub that supports 18-24-year-olds in education, employment and training.

Rochdale Development Agency (RDA) is working to support inward investment, creating a number of job opportunities and attracting a number of businesses into the borough. As part of this, high-skilled job opportunities have been identified through Atom Valley and the Advanced Machinery and Productivity Institute (AMPI).

2. Information, access to support and advice (including welfare advice)

Our Cost of Living Helpline provides a single point of access for residents looking for advice and support in the borough. We have also redesigned the way we deliver welfare advice in order to provide more face-to-face advice in communities, whilst continuing to strengthen our phone and digital support offer. As part of this offer we have commissioned a number of community centres to offer multi-lingual support in their communities, in addition to the wide range of support being offered through commissioned services like Citizens Advice, and Living Well, with the kindness of their Community Champions being a significant support to residents.

3. Housing

We are investing in a programme to increase the provision of housing accommodation by bringing empty properties and vacant land back into use. The programme makes the best use of existing housing stock and improves substandard and defective properties. The programme also enables the development of vacant land which not only increases the supply of affordable accommodation but also improves the economic, social and environmental well-being of areas across the borough

In light of Home Office policy changes reducing the notice periods for individuals and families exiting asylum accommodation, we are mobilising a new cross-directorate service to support individuals and families exiting the asylum system. This will help reduce the likelihood of rough sleeping and destitution amongst asylum seekers.

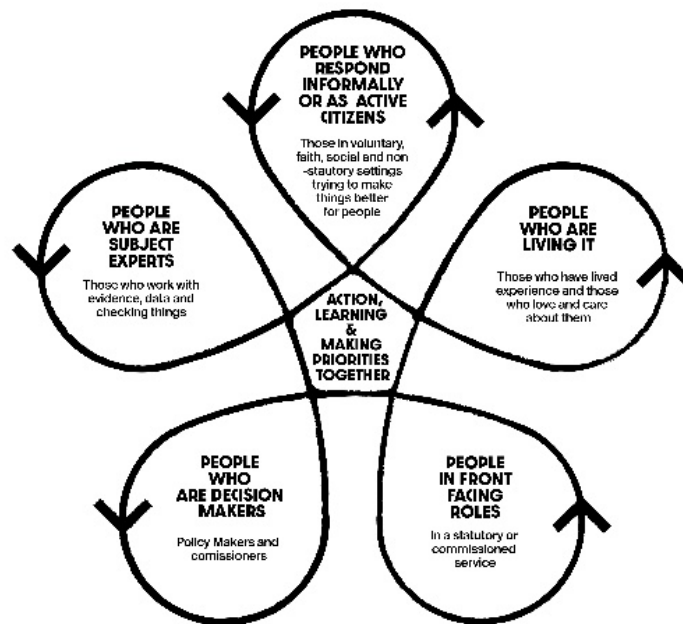
We are also working alongside Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and energy companies to help low-income and vulnerable households access free energy efficiency measures that could lower energy bills.

4. Systems change, Identity and Relationships

In Rochdale Borough, we identify as a “MEAM” (Making Every Adult Matter) place. This means we take a “system wide” view to improve our understanding of how poverty intersects with other types of inequity; especially for those people who have experienced adverse childhood experiences or trauma.

MEAM places a particular emphasis on participatory co-production, providing space to include experiences, feelings, identity and relationships. This has directly influenced our borough’s Prevention Strategy, equity, diversity and inclusion work, workforce development and of course, this, our Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The progress made in this work indicates a fundamental change in our whole system understanding of what we value. In the 21st century, a notion that public, or any services, can solve a problem through the provision of an intervention, is outdated and ineffective, and so it is imperative that we work together to shape a collectively owned ecosystem of support. We do this through work which could be described as co-production, recognising several important groups illustrated in the below diagram. This change is evident in all our plans, for people of all ages, including our work towards community wealth building, and the changes we are making to the way “good help”, “information,” and “governance” happen through system transformation and reform programmes.



Helping Communities to Rise

Whilst it is not acceptable for us to tolerate poverty, it is also true that people in the borough have a deep sense of the ability of communities to rise up and solve problems. This resilience is part of the wealth we have in abundance and our strategy aims to value and elevate this further.

Rochdale borough has a vibrant network of over 1000 VCFSE organisations who are working to alleviate poverty and support residents. These organisations hold a vast amount of knowledge and are often very close to the communities they serve, sometimes even being made up of people from those communities. These organisations help bring individuals, and ultimately, communities, together creating mutual support.

This network of VCFSE organisations is supported by Action Together, the borough's infrastructure organisation, which supports organisations to obtain grant funding and provides training and resources and support to the sector. Action Together has been transforming the way the VCFSE interacts with communities, organisations and anchor institutions through the development of networks and approaches which help our communities to rise.

OUR FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Critical to the success of this strategy are a number of core principles, which are:

- **Proportionate Universalism:** we must provide a universal offer but we also must provide more intensive support for those who need it most. Services are therefore

universally available, not only for the most disadvantaged, but particular individuals and communities may need more resource because their need is greater.

- **Focus on Prevention:** Prevention is better than cure, therefore, we will focus on stopping poverty before it arises and when it does arise, we'll work to break its cycle. We will focus on empowering and enabling residents to support themselves.
- **A Collaborative Approach:** The only way we can make a difference in reducing poverty is through a collaborative approach across the whole system. This will include people who help us understand data, evidence or ideas; people with a lived/living experience of poverty; people in communities, citizens, neighbours and volunteers; people who are working on the front line trying to help and people who make decisions, develop policies and commission things. We need to take action, learn and develop priorities together, underpinned by a shared understanding that it's not okay for people to be in poverty and it's not okay that some people are suffering.

The insights gained from the Anti-Poverty Summits, as well as other "listening opportunities" have been brought together with wider qualitative and quantitative data, to establish the objectives set out in this Anti-Poverty Strategy.

OBJECTIVES

We have divided the actions we are going to take over this five-year strategy into 4 themes and 11 objectives. The first 3 themes are concerned with directly helping residents across our borough. The 4th theme is about improving how we do things so that we are more inclusive and collaborative.

Some objectives can be achieved over a relatively small timescale, whereas others will require significant development over several years. Our anti-poverty work will also continue to be responsive to emerging issues in the community. If we need to change our approach to meet the changing needs of our community then we will do so.

THEME 1: INTERVENING EARLY

This theme is concerned with identifying those people who are at risk of falling down the trap door into poverty and intervening early to prevent this. It means providing residents with tailored help and support before they hit a crisis. We need to make it easy for residents who might need support to reach out and get it. We also need to ensure that those who are working in front-line jobs are able to spot those people who may be struggling and have the skills and confidence to offer support. Intervening early also means doing targeted work to minimise the costs that residents face and to maximise their income, for example, by doing targeted work with groups known to be under-claiming benefits, such as older residents who are not accessing the pension credits they are entitled to.

By intervening early we can reduce the number of people who fall into poverty and reduce the demand for services that support people.

OBJECTIVE 1: HELP PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES TO MAXIMISE THEIR INCOME AND MINIMISE THEIR COSTS, BUILDING FINANCIAL RESILIENCE, AND REDUCING INDEBTEDNESS

- Promote Rochdale Borough's Cost of Living Toolkit in all appropriate settings and commit to updating to ensure it remains current.
- Continue to roll out the new welfare advice model of delivery, which includes telephone, digital and face-to-face provision in local communities for those who are digitally excluded, or don't speak English as a first language. In particular, continue to offer face-to-face advice in two locations in each township, as a minimum. Ensure that all residents are aware of this offer across the borough.
- Form a Citizens Advice-led Welfare Advice Forum, where welfare advice partners can come together, share resources and good practice, and promote a more joined-up approach to welfare advice delivery across the borough.
- Focus on prevention by facilitating easier access to advice at an earlier stage. This includes exploring opportunities to deliver increased outreach, welfare rights and debt advice and making sure everyone knows their role in tackling poverty and supporting residents
- Continue to offer good quality training, information and support to those in a position to help residents so they are empowered and enabled to do so.
- Maximise residents' income by interventions such as doing targeted work with groups known to be under-claiming benefits; for example, older residents who are not accessing the pension credits they are entitled.
- Aid those residents who are digitally excluded, to access the same support and outcomes as others by making sure there's a suitably targeted non-digital offer.
- Increase the digital skills of those who are digitally excluded by offering training, appropriate devices, and affordable connectivity.
- Look to extend welfare and debt advice in family hubs and schools, to ensure that those parents who are most in need of support can access it.
- Work with schools and colleges in the borough to promote and implement financial education for pupils across all age groups.
- Work with partners and communications colleagues to increase usage of Benefit Checker and Better Off calculators, to ensure that residents are getting access to all the financial benefits they are entitled to.
- Support people on low incomes, who smoke, to quit by providing direct stop smoking support or by using very brief advice to signpost and refer people to stop smoking services and resources.

"IT'S CLEAR THAT HOW PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT THEMSELVES, ALONG WITH HOW OTHERS FEEL ABOUT THEM, AND THE EFFECT OF PEER PRESSURE, PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN PEOPLE'S

OBJECTIVE 2: HELP RESIDENTS ON LOW INCOMES TO MANAGE THEIR HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURES AND REDUCE DEBT

- Promote Manchester Credit Union and Metro Moneywise as ethical and sustainable money lenders, doing work to steer residents away from illegal loan sharks and unsustainable money lenders.
- Work with partners to tackle illegal money lending by promoting awareness through training and campaigns, and developing procedures to better support affected residents.

OBJECTIVE 3: REDUCE THE STIGMA THAT POVERTY CAN BRING, CREATING A CULTURE WHERE GIVING AND ASKING FOR HELP IS ENCOURAGED AND EASY TO DO, ENSURING THAT ANY SUPPORT OFFERED IS CULTURALLY SENSITIVE AND RESPECTFUL OF INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

- Review the current cost of living web pages and "helping hands" communication materials, to make it easy for residents to ask for help ensuring that any support offered is culturally sensitive and respectful of individual circumstances.
- Reduce the negative perceptions linked to seeking assistance. This will be achieved by learning how to use language to frame, brand and promote conversations and support around poverty.
- Ensure that advice information is available in accessible formats.
- Develop and implement anti-poverty audits, led by people with lived experience of poverty, to help services, organisations and groups understand and eradicate aspects of their service that contribute to poverty shame or stigma.

THEME 2: ALLEVIATING POVERTY

Alleviating poverty is about helping those people who are already experiencing poverty. It's about ensuring residents' basic needs, like food, warmth and shelter are met. This means building on the work we've already been doing to support residents, but making sure that we are able to flex the offer in response to the demand. Alleviating poverty also means ensuring that residents are not excluded from taking part in cultural and leisure activities because of their financial circumstances. Alleviating poverty is about helping residents in the borough retain their dignity, quality of life and independence.

OBJECTIVE 4: MEET PEOPLE'S BASIC NEEDS OF FOOD, WARMTH, SHELTER AND HEALTH

- Build on the current "helping hand" communications plan to raise awareness of discounts and how to apply e.g. Winter Fuel Payment, Warm Home Discount, Cold Weather Payments, energy provider discretionary funds

- Work to reduce food poverty in the borough, by promoting and supporting a sustainable network of food banks and food clubs, whilst working to eradicate the need for them.
- Support and expand cooking programmes like the Big Pan project that provides cooking skills to residents, enabling them to continue to eat healthily whilst on a budget.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of the welfare assistance programmes offered across the borough and commit to transitioning towards a cash-first approach, whenever feasible and suitable.
- Continue to provide investment to Action Together to administer grants to VCFSE groups across the borough who are providing support to residents around food, warmth and shelter.
- Continue to support our cost-of-living crisis response for as long as it is needed, including our dedicated cost-of-living helpline.

OBJECTIVE 5: ENSURE THAT CULTURE AND LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES ARE MADE AVAILABLE TO THOSE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING POVERTY.

- Work with Rochdale's leisure and cultural organisations to develop and promote an accessible culture and leisure offer for all, especially those for whom cost or inequity is a barrier.
- Expand what is on offer in Rochdale's cultural and leisure venues to ensure that residents can access wider support services at these community hubs
- Make available a wide range of community based events and educational programmes for Children and Young people, with a particular focus on promoting active travel.

THEME 3: SOLVING POVERTY

Solving poverty is no simple matter and requires a long-term and joined-up approach. People on low incomes face disadvantages that lock them out of social and economic participation. The state and markets are the key drivers which make it difficult for us to bring about the change we want at a local level. There are a large variety of reasons why someone may have ended up in poverty. For example, they may have suddenly and unexpectedly lost their job. Others may be in poverty because they have a long-term health condition, or may face discrimination because they don't speak English as a first language. There is, therefore, no single solution to helping people escape its grip. We are committed to helping those furthest away from the labour market back into employment or training. Underpinning this approach is the need for children to get a good educational start in life. However, far too many children across the borough are persistently absent from school. We, therefore, need to collaborate with schools to manage and improve school attendance across the borough. We are also committed to ensuring that the jobs that residents can access

are good quality and decently paid. It's also important that we support local businesses, where possible, and work to keep locally produced wealth in the borough, so it benefits those people that live here.

OBJECTIVE 6: RAISE SKILLS AND PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR HIGHER VALUE EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE CURRENTLY ON LOW-INCOMES

- Increase the number of Rochdale Borough employers who have signed up for the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter. Promote and celebrate those organisations that have already taken this step.
- Sustain and increase the number of employers in Rochdale borough paying the Real Living Wage, as well as promoting its benefits. Promote and celebrate those organisations that have already taken this step.
- Provide more intensive targeted support to residents with no qualifications, to help them into employment and/or training
- Embed employment and training opportunities into conversations with residents about what support is available in the borough.
- Support those in low-paid, low-skilled jobs, to improve their economic position through support, training and career advice.
- Ensure that residents are aware of their employment rights through a communications campaign, including the promotion of organisations like Citizens Advice and ACAS, which can support residents to “know their rights”
- Work with schools to proactively manage and improve school attendance across the borough

OBJECTIVE 7: GROW THE COMMUNITY WEALTH APPROACH IN ROCHDALE BOROUGH TO HELP TACKLE ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND CREATE A FAIRER ECONOMY - WHICH BUILDS MORE OPPORTUNITY, EQUALITY AND GROWTH FOR THOSE THAT NEED IT MOST

- Recognise community wealth building as a way of working, define what it means in and for our borough, and adopt it as a priority, with a vision and a framework which is unique to, and works for, Rochdale.
- Promote understanding of community wealth building in the council - how it can benefit our communities and how the council can promote it simply by doing the things we already do in a slightly different way.
- Develop strategies for commissioning and social value. These are important levers for community wealth building. These strategies will set out our principles around how we commission and why we have these values – that we will support the local economy by spending locally where we can to support our supply chains and the organisations which provide employment for our residents. Where this isn't feasible we will focus on supplier's social value offer to ensure the providers we work with take a local lens to

contract delivery and consider how they can work in ways to improve their social, economic and environmental impact.

- Support the conditions that help build community wealth through the transformation of governance in our partnerships and anchor institutions.

THEME 4: INCLUSIVE AND COLLABORATIVE DELIVERY

Rochdale is the birthplace of cooperation, and the cooperative spirit permeates the borough. We know that for meaningful change to take place, we need to draw upon that strong cooperative spirit. We must include those people within our communities who are directly affected by poverty in any anti-poverty work we carry out.

As cooperation is so important, we need to ensure that the various parts of the system are working together effectively. This includes more effective partnerships working with open and honest lines of communication. It also means us, where appropriate and feasible, physically coming together to deliver services at “one stop” shops in the community, ensuring that residents can receive joined up holistic support in accessible community venues.

This theme also includes finding the resources to sustain and increase the work already taking place, and finding ways in which to resource new areas of work or do things differently.

“PEOPLE ARE INDIVIDUALS AND WE REALLY SHOULD TAKE THE TIME TO MAKE SURE OUR SYSTEM UNDERSTANDS THEM AS SUCH SO WE DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS.” **MEMBER OF ROCHDALE BOROUGH LEADERSHIP TEAM.**

OBJECTIVE 8: ENSURE THAT “PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF POVERTY” AND OUR VCFSE COLLEAGUES ARE INVOLVED BY DEFAULT WHEN ANY POLICY OR PROJECT IS BEING DEVELOPED TO REDUCE POVERTY.

- Establish a Lived Experience Circle that will assure the involvement of people with lived experience of poverty to ensure ongoing collaboration around our anti-poverty strategy and associated processes, strategies and action plans.
- Work with relevant support organisations to ensure ongoing representation and support for groups most affected by poverty, such as communities experiencing racial inequalities and people with disabilities.

OBJECTIVE 9: PUT CO-OPERATION AT THE HEART OF OUR ANTI-POVERTY WORK, BY ENSURING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POLICYMAKERS, THOSE WITH SUBJECT EXPERTISE, AND THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE AND DEEP ROOTS IN COMMUNITIES.

- Establish a VCFSE-led Anti-Poverty Coalition that will act as the central body of accountability and decision-making for our anti-poverty work.
- Build upon existing initiatives which address inequity in our institutions such as “poverty proofing the school day” and “building a poverty resistant NHS”. We will create inclusive educational and healthcare environments that alleviate the financial strain on

families and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in school and health services.

- Carry out and maintain a Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) assessment on the anti-poverty approach to better understand the intersection of poverty with inequity and other sustainability issues, including environmental sustainability.
- Embed the socioeconomic duty in decision-making of public, private and voluntary sector organisations, to ensure that the connection between poverty and inequity is made explicit in all work.
- Work with partners to provide tailored support for the communities most likely to be experiencing poverty, including residents with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), ethnic minorities, residents with long-term health conditions or disabilities, elderly people, large families, etc.

OBJECTIVE 10: FIND NEW WAYS OF FUNDING AND RESOURCING ANTI-POVERTY WORK IN ROCHDALE BOROUGH.

- Ensure further investment resources are available for VCFSE organisations who are looking to access external funding to continue their work, or to initiate new projects.
- Review our current grant-funding streams and look to reconfigure them in a manner that better supports anti-poverty efforts. Through this process, we aim to provide greater certainty of funding for organizations dedicated to alleviating poverty.
- Explore the possibility of bringing in funding contributions from private sector organisations and philanthropic giving in order to help resource our anti-poverty work.
- Make better use of social value commitments to contribute additional resources to anti-poverty work.

“POVERTY SCARS. IT SCARRED ME, FROM WHEN I WAS YOUNGER. AND I KNOW THAT CAN LAST FOR YEARS, AFFECTING YOUR SELF-ESTEEM, HOLDING YOU BACK, STOPPING YOU FROM PUTTING YOURSELF OUT THERE. SO IT’S HORRIBLE TO SEE OUR KIDS GOING THROUGH THAT NOW.” **MUM IN CASTLETON**

OBJECTIVE 11: USE DATA TO HELP UNDERSTAND POVERTY IN ROCHDALE BOROUGH AND TO DESIGN AND TARGET INTERVENTIONS ACCORDINGLY, MAKING SURE THAT WE CONSIDER INEQUALITIES AND INEQUITY IN HOW POVERTY IS EXPERIENCED.

- Use data, along with engagement and insight to identify the places and communities that have the highest concentrations of poverty so we can design and target interventions, ensuring that we focus our response on the neighbourhoods and households that need it most.

- Create and maintain a list of key performance indicators and other data that can be shared with people and organisations working to tackle poverty in Rochdale borough.
- Ensure that any data that is used to support our poverty work is understood and filtered through people's lived experience of facing poverty and people who are responding to poverty in communities.
- Develop targeted and bespoke programmes of work to support those residents who are most likely to experience inequality and discrimination. For example, women, children and young people, older people, communities who experience racial inequalities, disabled people, people experiencing mental health conditions and people in areas with the highest concentrations of poverty.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Poverty is a deep systemic issue in our communities. If we are going to make a difference, we need to make an alliance between people with decision-making power, subject expertise, and those with lived experience and deep roots in communities. To facilitate this, we have three places where this anti-poverty work will be driven forward.

- **Poverty Strategic Group:** This includes partners from the public and VCFSE sectors who are committed to driving forward the objectives set out in the strategy and ensuring that it links to wider schemes of work.
- **Anti-Poverty Network:** This VCFSE-led group will bring together representatives of different communities, networks and forums, who will work to deepen our understanding and develop plans around addressing poverty. It will also be a "critical friend" to the Poverty Strategic Group and the strategy they are driving forward.
- **Lived Experience Circle:** Feeds into our anti-poverty work the insights, priorities and messages from participatory action and research undertaken by groups of people with lived experience of poverty. This group will also hold the system to account and, in particular, the truth that this strategy will only make strategic change if it pushes beyond what we're already doing into more radical change. This group plays an important role in leading the "how we feel we're doing around poverty" part of measuring the difference we're making.
- **Health and Wellbeing Board:** The Health and Wellbeing Board leads the improvement of the health and wellbeing for Rochdale. Our anti-poverty work will feed directly into this board.

What difference we want to make

"WHAT WOULD TELL ME WE WERE DOING WELL WITH ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY? NO CHILD GOES HUNGRY." **COMMUNITY CHAMPION**

"I'D LIKE MY FAMILY, MY FRIENDS AND MYSELF TO BE HAPPY, HEALTHY AND CONTENT. THAT'S ALL". **GRANDPARENT IN ROCHDALE**

“WHAT WOULD BE A GOOD OUTCOME FOR ME? THAT WE HAVE GOOD QUALITY INFORMATION THAT WE CAN USE TO GET PEOPLE WHERE THEY NEED TO BE QUICKLY.”

COMMUNITY CHAMPION

“LESS ISOLATION. YOU LOSE CONTACT WHEN YOU HAVE NO MONEY. BECAUSE OF PRIDE AND THAT. BUT THERE ARE THINGS OUT THERE TO DO AND PEOPLE TO HELP. BUT YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE GOING. I JUST THINK IF PEOPLE KEPT THAT CONTACT, THEY'D BE OK. THEY'D FEEL OK TO LET OTHERS HELP, BECAUSE THEY KNOW THEY'D DO THE SAME.”

OLDER PERSON IN ROCHDALE

“IT'S IMPORTANT, WHEN YOU ARE DOING THIS WORK, YOU WORRY ABOUT PEOPLE, AND IT'S IMPORTANT TO KNOW THE RESULTS: IS THIS PERSON GOING TO BE OK NOW?”

FRONT LINE WORKER

MEASURING THE DIFFERENCE WE'RE MAKING

Measuring the difference we are making is complex as there is no definite data that can tell us the overall number of people who are living in poverty in Rochdale at any one time. We also know that poverty is driven by a whole host of national and international factors that are difficult to influence at a local authority level. Despite this, we can use data to understand:

- The risk of people experiencing poverty. For example, if we know that there are more people accessing debt advice and unemployment is going up, then we know that the levels of poverty are likely to be going up as well.
- We can measure whether some of the objectives set out in this strategy – for example, to increase the numbers of employers who pay the Real Living Wage – have been successful.
- Data from individual services, for example, the number of households accessing the council tax support team, can help us to re-design our services so they are having a greater impact.

For each of the objectives in this strategy, there are a number of specific areas of work that will be put into a work plan and will include an evaluation framework. In order to measure whether we've made a positive difference to people's lives, each project will need to be evaluated most effectively for that particular project.

In addition to this, we have set out several KPIs for the whole strategy in Appendix 1, which will be used to understand long term changes.

This strategy and its objectives have been built through a process of design thinking-led co-production. This process is ongoing and the measurement of success will be both co-produced and co-delivered: our governance structure has been designed with this in mind.

SOME FINAL WORDS

Poverty is harmful and can affect any of us. It's not a problem for a fixed group of 'other' people. Poverty hurts families, society, the education system, the economy, and affects the quality of life of us all, damaging health, wellbeing and prospects.

We want this policy to be a life raft for families across the borough who are struggling to stay afloat. We have a duty to look out for each other and will be a stronger borough if we act together to solve poverty. And it is possible to make a difference. There are countless examples. It will not be quick or easy, but with vision, commitment and collaboration, we can all play our part in creating a borough where the worst off people and places are not left behind.

Case Study

The New Pioneers were originally set up to support residents in Lower Falinge and College Bank to increase employment and career progression. It starts from the basis that many residents are willing and able to work more and aspire to better jobs, but are stuck in a situation of underemployment, dependent on government benefits through a range of circumstances. They have been supporting Samuel for the past year:

"MY FAMILY AND I ARE ORIGINALLY FROM NIGERIA. WE WERE SETTLED BRIEFLY IN VERONA, ITALY, BUT MOVED TO HEYWOOD EARLY IN 2023. UNFORTUNATELY, MY WIFE LEFT ME SHORTLY AFTER MOVING HERE, LEAVING ME TO LOOK AFTER OUR FOUR CHILDREN. I WAS WORKING AT A WAREHOUSE IN ROCHDALE, BUT LOST MY JOB FOR NO REASON – MY CONTRACT HAD BEEN ZERO HOURS AND THE WORK HAD BEEN DECREASING AFTER THE CHRISTMAS PERIOD.

I WAS REALLY WORRIED ABOUT PAYING MY RENT, FEEDING MY CHILDREN, AND KEEPING WARM IN THE WINTER MONTHS. AT THE TIME OF BEING REFERRED TO THE NEW PIONEERS, THERE WAS NO FOOD IN THE HOUSE AND IT WAS COLD AND DAMP. THE PIONEERS ACCESSED SOME FOOD VOUCHERS AND DELIVERED THEM OUT OF HOURS ON A SATURDAY MORNING. MY FAMILY AND I WERE SO PLEASED, AND MY CHILDREN CRIED WITH HAPPINESS. AFTER THAT, I WAS SUPPORTED BY HEYWOOD FOODBANK FOR SEVERAL WEEKS AND THE PIONEERS HELPED ME TO ACCESS BENEFITS AND OTHER SUPPORT LIKE FREE SCHOOL MEALS.

MY FRIDGE FREEZER WAS BROKEN SO THE PIONEERS HELPED ME ACCESS A NEW ONE FROM THE COUNCIL'S HOUSEHOLD FUND. I ALSO RECEIVED A DONATED MATTRESS FROM SPOTLAND COMMUNITY CENTRE, SO THAT MY CHILDREN DIDN'T NEED TO SLEEP ON THE SOFA.

I STRUGGLE WITH MY READING AND WRITING AND PIONEERS HELPED ME TO ACCESS CLASSES. THEY SUPPORTED ME IN APPLYING FOR A NEW JOB AND HELPED ME TO PREPARE FOR THE JOB INTERVIEWS. AFTER A FEW INTERVIEWS, I WAS SUCCESSFUL AND STARTED A NEW FULL-TIME JOB IN BURY. I'M DOING WELL WITH THE COMPANY AND AM NOW CONSIDERING SELF-EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AS A TAXI DRIVER.

THANK YOU FOR HELPING ME AND MY FAMILY. I FELT VERY DESPERATE AFTER LOSING MY JOB AND WAS WORRIED ABOUT THE FUTURE. I DIDN'T KNOW THAT THERE WERE PLACES TO HELP ACCESS FOOD FOR MY FAMILY OR ACCESS EXTRA SUPPORT UNTIL I MET MARK FROM THE NEW PIONEERS. THE PIONEER'S TEAM HAS HELPED US LOOK FORWARD TO THE FUTURE."

APPENDIX 1

Theme	Indicator
Children	% of children in receipt of free school meals
Children	Child Poverty Rates
Debt	Average amount of debt of those who seek debt advice
Debt	People in employment who are approaching Citizens Advice for debt advice
Debt	People seeking debt advice who have previously taken out payday loans
Debt	People seeking debt advice who have been subject to debt enforcement
Deprivation	Index of Multiple Deprivation (% of LSOAs in 10% most deprived areas)
Employment	% of benefit claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64
Employment	% of benefit claimants as a proportion of residents aged 18-24
Employment	Borough employment rate
Employment	National Minimum Wage coverage by home location
Employment	Jobs paid less than the Real Living Wage
Employment	Proportion of people paid the National Living Wage
Employment	Average Gross Pay (full time workers)
Food	Food parcels distributed by Trussell Trust
Food	Proportion of households experiencing food insecurity
Fuel Poverty	No. of fuel vouchers provided to households
Fuel Poverty	Households in Fuel Poverty
Fuel Poverty	Fuel insecurity
Housing	No. of housing benefit recipients
Housing	No. of households living in temporary accommodation
Housing	No. of temporary accommodation households placed in in B&B accommodation
Housing	No. of calls from residents to housing support team
Housing	No. of households accessing the Local Council Tax Support Scheme