

BUILDING BRIDGES TO OPPORTUNITY

Position Statement



BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Plymouth City Council has a clear ambition to tackle poverty in the city and to raise the living standard of its residents. This is evident from commitments in the Plymouth Plan and other core council strategies. Whether it's the cost-of-living crisis that continues to persist, supporting residents and communities through the COVID pandemic or the ongoing impact on children living in poverty, the Council and its partners don't just respond, they are proactive in the work they undertake to support resident's and communities and to ensure that every resident, young or old, has the opportunity to thrive, to fulfil their potential and ambitions and be a positive contributor to society.

City Context

As evidenced in the [Plymouth Report 2023](#), there is a long-standing awareness of the deprivation that exists in Plymouth. Inequality occurs both geographically across the city and within and across communities, with disadvantaged and marginalised populations most severely affected.

Plymouth has two Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the most deprived 1 per cent in England. These are home to 3,617 residents - 1.4 per cent of the total Plymouth population. Furthermore, Plymouth has 28 LSOAs in the most deprived 10 per cent in England and these are home to 46,075 residents - 17.6 per cent of the population¹. The documented extent of poverty, deprivation and inequality that exists in pockets across Plymouth is strongly linked to poor health outcomes across the city, and the net effect of this means that there is a substantial gap in life expectancy and a lower-than-average healthy life expectancy. Health issues such as obesity and poor mental health are more prevalent in people from disadvantaged backgrounds².

The pockets of deprivation and poverty in Plymouth relate to the city's economy with these areas seeing a cycle of poverty which they struggle to exit because of low paid jobs and an ever-increasing cost of living. The type and nature of jobs in the city mean that some working families are still struggling to afford to pay for essentials such as food and heating and to maintain a good quality home. Plymouth's pay currently stands at 92.3 per cent of the UK average and the city has a higher rate of economic inactivity than seen nationally. The Plymouth Plan 2014-2034 recognises and seeks to overcome some of these challenges to support people in Plymouth to live in happy, healthy, safe and aspiring communities, where social, economic and environmental conditions and services enable choices that add quality years to life and reduce the gap in health and wellbeing between communities.

A City of Opportunity

As 'Britain's Ocean City', few places can rival Plymouth's rich cultural history, natural and built environment, and community assets. The city has a population of almost 264,800, a real economic output of over £5.4 billion and a growing workforce of almost 116,000 people.

Plymouth has strong public sector anchor organisations including three institutes of higher education and a large teaching hospital providing secondary and tertiary services across the region, as well as being home to the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park and the Plymouth and South Devon Freeport. Specific sectors such as Marine and Defence, Manufacturing, Medical, and Digital industries are central to the

¹ [English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

² [What Are Health Inequalities? | The King's Fund \(kingsfund.org.uk\)](#)

success of Plymouth's economy and present key high value opportunities, including Ocean Futures, advancements in Health Tech, and Immersive Digi-Tech.

Rationale

Plymouth City Council is deeply committed to improving the lives of Plymouth residents. We know the profound effect poverty has on people – it impacts everything from life expectancy to employment opportunities. Too many people are struggling, and this has been magnified by the current rising costs of essentials such as food and energy bills. We recognise that no one person or organisation holds all the levers to address poverty, so it is more important than ever that we work together with our partners to take tangible action and break down barriers to tackle poverty across the city.

To maximise our opportunities this programme of work seeks to capture how current strategies, services, and initiatives are addressing poverty, identify areas of excellence and gaps in provision, and share learning across the organisation and with partners. To facilitate this, we will co-develop a framework with our partners and our residents to capture current evidence based and locally informed approaches to addressing poverty in Plymouth.

LOCAL POLICY

The work that is being undertaken is firmly situated within the [Plymouth Plan](#): a ground-breaking strategic plan which looks ahead to 2034. It sets a shared direction of travel for the long-term future of the city bringing together several strategic planning processes into one place. Fundamentally, the Plymouth Plan recognises that many things about the place that a person is born into and lives their life can have a profound impact on their wellbeing, their health and even the length of their life. The plan outlines the vision for Plymouth around three strategic themes of a 'Healthy City', a 'Growing City' and an 'International City'. The content of the plan also reflects the best evidence for achieving this, linking to the Marmot policy objectives.

This framework will link with the following policies:

- HEA 1 – Addressing health inequalities
- HEA 2 – Delivering the best outcomes for children, young people and families
- HEA 4 – Playing an active role in the city
- HEA 5 – Delivering strong and safe communities and good quality neighbourhoods
- HEA 8 – Meeting local housing needs
- GRO 1 – Creating the conditions for economic growth
- GRO 2 – Delivering skills and talent development
- INT 8 – Celebrating diverse communities

The 'Building Bridges to Opportunity' framework is also complimentary to Thrive Plymouth, which is seeking to improve health and wellbeing outcomes and more specifically reduce the inequality gap in those risk factors and outcomes across the city and between specific groups of people.

NATIONAL POLICY

This programme is strongly aligned with the values of the current UK Government and Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's recent announcement of a ministerial Child Poverty Task Force supported by a new Child Poverty Unit in the Cabinet Office. It will also support the delivery of two of the UK Government's National Missions:

- 1 – Kickstart economic growth - To secure the highest sustained growth in the G7 – with good jobs and productivity growth in every part of the country making everyone, not just a few, better off.
- 4 – Break down barriers to opportunity – To break down the barriers to opportunity for every child, at every stage and shatter the class ceiling.

DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK



To reduce the impact of poverty on the people of Plymouth three overlapping lenses need to be considered.

As previously mentioned, we know that living in conditions of poverty and deprivation is linked with poorer health outcomes, including shorter life expectancy and a larger proportion of life living in poor health³. A key aspect of a framework to address poverty needs to include measures to mitigate this and reduce the harm that people experience because of their living conditions. Reducing harm does not in itself address the underlying issues of poverty and deprivation within the population, the second part of the framework addresses helping people to lift themselves out of poverty.

We also know that some groups are at particular risk of falling into poverty including people from ethnic minority groups, people with disabilities, and single parent families. However, with an uncertain economic climate and job market, and the general possibility of injury and illness, the risk of falling into poverty is experienced by many more people than those who are most at risk. The third lens focusses on reducing this risk of people falling into poverty.

³ [What Are Health Inequalities? | The King's Fund \(kingsfund.org.uk\)](https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/what-are-health-inequalities/)

Over the next 12 months we will develop a framework of themes around these three lenses and capture how Plymouth City Council and its strategic partners are addressing poverty through their existing strategies and plans.

PROPOSED PRINCIPLES

Whole Systems

It is evident that poverty is a complex issue with many factors affecting who experiences poverty and what impact it has on their lives. As such it is perhaps equally evident that to address poverty, we need to take a whole systems approach and act as a systems leader through our work with communities and partners across the public, private, and voluntary and social sectors. Whole system approaches encompass both co-development of solutions and consideration of all aspects of the system including the built and natural environment, community assets, formal and informal services, and the cultural and policy context⁴.

Lifecourse

Part of recognising this complex nature of poverty is the acknowledgement that poverty is both multi- and trans-generational. That is, it affects people across all generations, and poverty in one generation affects the experience of other generations particularly within the context of individual families. While the multi-generational nature of poverty is perhaps self-evident, its trans-generational nature is not. This is perhaps best illustrated by taking child poverty as an example. A child living in poverty is generally caused by poverty in the family unit. The child's caregivers are usually the income generators and if they are unable to generate sufficient income to meet the needs of themselves and their dependants this results in poverty for all members of the family.

This effect is propagated from one generation to the next with evidence that there is a lasting impact on educational attainment and job opportunities for people who grow up in more deprived areas increasing the risk of these people falling into poverty⁵. There is however little evidence for the commonly held belief of cultures of worklessness and multiple generations of families remaining unemployed or not seeking employment⁶. This multi- and trans-generational nature of poverty necessitates taking a lifecourse approach to addressing it⁷.

To successfully address child poverty there not only needs to be services to reduce the harm they experience, but also interventions and policies that help parents lift themselves out of and stay out of poverty, and initiatives in place to ensure children have the best opportunities for good quality education and employment, and secure and healthy home environments as they move into their own adulthood.

⁴ [What are the elements of a whole system approach to community-centred public health? A qualitative study with public health leaders in England's local authority areas | BMJ Open](#)

⁵ [The long shadow of deprivation: differences in opportunities across England \(HTML\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶ [Are 'cultures of worklessness' passed down the generations? | Joseph Rowntree Foundation \(jrf.org.uk\)](#)

⁷ [Poverty and Health Disparities: Breaking the Intergenerational Cycle of Disadvantage: The Three Generation Approach - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

WORK TO DATE

This programme of work has been led by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Cooperative Development and Communities, and is building on the Child Poverty Action Plan [Child poverty action plan 2022-25 | PLYMOUTH.GOV.UK](#). It will broaden the remit of our current Child Poverty work and will ensure that there is a wider focus on poverty across the city.

Initial stages of this work have involved a workshop with relevant officers from across the Council, input from the Office of the Director of Public Health and the Policy and Intelligence Team, and consultation with Cabinet Members. Out of this has come the three lenses model above and an initial series of themes (See Appendix A) which will inform the development of the final framework.

GOVERNANCE

It is proposed that the Child Poverty Cabinet Advisory Group chaired by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Cooperative Development and Communities will become the steering group for this programme. The existing Child Poverty Cabinet Advisory Group is currently reviewing its Terms of Reference to reflect the Building Bridges to Opportunity programme and their role in this. As part of this the chair will ensure that appropriate counsellors, officers, and partners are included and agree an officer working group to lead on the programme implementation. This will be reported to Cabinet.

We propose that the Building Bridges to Opportunity Programme will report to Cabinet at regular intervals.

PROPOSED PLANS FOR NEXT 12 MONTHS

Outcome 1 – Co-produce a framework for addressing poverty in Plymouth:

- Working with both internal and external stakeholders including community members and people with lived experience.
- Based around the three lenses of reducing the impact of poverty, helping people lift themselves out of poverty, and reducing the risk of people falling into poverty.
- Considering the principles of whole systems working and a lifecourse approach.

Outcome 2 – Work with council teams and strategic partners to:

- Develop a shared narrative around poverty, its drivers and impact on our population, and the role of Plymouth City Council and its strategic partners in addressing this.
- Map existing strategies, plans, and initiatives to the framework.
- Identify core initiatives in each plan and assess their impact using existing key performance indicators and explore how the impact could be improved.
- Identify areas of excellence and gaps in current provision.
- Share learning.

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET

Recommendation 1: For Cabinet to support the launch of this programme and request 6 monthly updates to come to Cabinet.

Recommendation 2: For Cabinet to request the Leader of the Council to make a formal appointment of a champion for this programme.

Appendix A – Proposed Theme from initial engagement work

<p>Theme 1:</p>	<p>Pursuing a prosperous and inclusive economy - Having access to good quality employment, which offers jobs for a wide range of different skill types and levels, with flexibility to support people with caring responsibilities or disabilities.</p>
<p>Theme 2:</p>	<p>Reaching potential - Giving people, especially children, a different view of a life to aspire to, can help to drive increased attainment. Society as whole has an obligation to the children and young people in the city to encourage them to look beyond what they know and see day to day and aspire to reach their potential whatever that might be.</p>
<p>Theme 3:</p>	<p>Improving lifelong learning education and transitions - Supporting people to learn when they are ready to, and offering a wide range of opportunities if circumstances change through life, and a different type of employment becomes more suitable.</p>
<p>Theme 4:</p>	<p>Addressing homelessness, housing and household support - Living in poor quality or unstable housing has very negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing.</p>
<p>Theme 5:</p>	<p>Strengthening families and communities, including supporting groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty - The role of the family and the wider community is key and can offer support in ways which can help at an earlier point and sometime more effectively than many of the statutory services.</p>
<p>Theme 6:</p>	<p>Improving health and wellbeing outcomes for people on low incomes - Health and work are interrelated; poor conditions or lack of work can lead to poor health, but also poor health can lead to reduced incomes.</p>
<p>Theme 7:</p>	<p>Financial assistance and helping people on low incomes to maximise their income and minimise their costs - Having a low income can be expensive and so help with budgets and tariffs, and community programmes such as social supermarkets can help the money go further. In addition, many people do not get all the benefits that they are entitled to.</p>