

# Anti-Poverty Strategy 2020-2023

## Executive Summary

Cambridge is a very prosperous city. It has a strong economy, driven by a combination of its world-renowned Universities and a globally significant cluster of hi-tech and bio-technology businesses. However, despite the continuing growth of the Cambridge economy, there are a significant proportion of households in the city living on low incomes or in poverty:

- More than 1 in 10 of residents lived in households claiming benefits in 2017<sup>1</sup>
- Average weekly earnings for the lowest 10% of earners in 2018 were £162 per week, which is 3.5 times less than the average for all Cambridge employees<sup>2</sup>
- There were 8,766 visits to Cambridge City Foodbank in 2018 for emergency food
- 12.3% of households were in fuel poverty in 2017<sup>3</sup>

Cambridge City Council is committed to tackling poverty in the city. Since 2014 the Council has produced two Anti-Poverty Strategies, focussing on raising standards of living for people in poverty and addressing the issues which lead to financial pressures. The Council has delivered a wide range of services and projects to support people in poverty through a combination of its mainstream services and providing over £1.86 million in additional funding for more than 30 projects since 2014.

The revised Anti-Poverty Strategy for 2020-2023 represents an evolution of the Council's approach to addressing poverty, building on the learning from services and projects delivered over the past 6 years. The three underpinning themes of the Council's approach will be to:

1. *Focus on addressing the root causes of poverty through preventative activity, whilst also responding to the effects of poverty experienced by households in Cambridge.* This means addressing issues such as low-paid, insecure employment and low levels of skills and education, as well as the effects of poverty such as debt, fuel poverty, food poverty and digital exclusion.
2. *Balancing direct delivery, partnership-working and influencing and lobbying work.* There are some issues where the Council is well placed to act, such as housing, homelessness and public health issues. In areas where the Council is not the lead agency, such as employment, education and skills and elements of the benefits system, we will work in partnership with other local organisations. Where

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<sup>1</sup> Cambridge City Council, 2017, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support data

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2018, Annual Survey of Household Earnings

<sup>3</sup> Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2020, Fuel poverty data

powers lie with Government or other agencies, we will lobby for meaningful changes to policy and funding.

3. *Building the capacity of residents and communities and facilitating community action and mutual support.* Building on the experience of working with local voluntary and community groups through our first two strategies and the groundswell of volunteering and mutual aid in Cambridge in response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Council will work collaboratively with local voluntary groups and local residents and help facilitate community action and mutual aid to address poverty.

It is proposed that the revised Anti-Poverty Strategy will focus on addressing five key objectives:

***Objective 1 - Helping people on low incomes to maximise their income and minimise their costs***

A combination of low incomes and high costs of living in Cambridge make it challenging for some people to meet basic costs. It is likely that the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic will push more people into economic hardship, whilst exacerbating existing poverty for people who were receiving benefits, in low paid or insecure employment or who have no credit history or savings to fall back on.

The Council will help increase incomes through influencing local employers to pay staff the Real Living Wage and supporting residents to claim their full benefits entitlement, whilst helping to reduce costs through supporting local activity to address debt and financial issues, food poverty, fuel poverty, and digital inclusion.

***Objective 2 - Strengthening families and communities, including supporting groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty***

Deprivation is concentrated in particular neighbourhoods in Abbey, Kings Hedges, Arbury and East Chesterton wards. The Council will work with local voluntary and community groups to help strengthen local communities. We will also explore opportunities for multi-agency collaboration to address underlying issues in the most deprived communities in the city.

The Council will take action to support particular groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty, including older people, disabled people, BAME people, LGBT people and women.

***Objective 3 - Promoting an inclusive economy, by raising skills and improving access to a range of employment opportunities for people on low incomes.***

While Cambridge has a strong economy, evidence suggests that there are high levels of inequality in the city. The Council will seek to promote a more inclusive economy, where all residents can benefit from the city's prosperity.

A key part of this will be addressing underlying skills issues. Evidence suggests that there is a concentration of high-skilled jobs and highly-skilled employees in Cambridge. With limited numbers of mid-level jobs in the city, it can be difficult for residents with lower levels of skills, education and qualifications to secure higher paid employment.

The Council has some scope to influence new business developments through Local Plan policies and plans for major new developments such as North East Cambridge. We will also need to work with employers, schools, FE colleges, universities, GCP and the Combined Authority to address these underlying education and skills issues.

We will also work with local businesses to identify ways in which they might use their skills, capacity and resources to help tackle poverty and disadvantage. This could include businesses making financial contributions, engaging with local schools or providing skilled volunteers to support local charities taking action to reduce poverty

***Objective 4 - Addressing the high cost of housing, improving housing conditions, and reducing homelessness.***

The high cost of housing in Cambridge means that home ownership and private rented accommodation are out of reach for most people on low incomes. To increase the supply of affordable housing, the Council is building 500 new Council homes and using its planning powers to secure affordable homes as part of new developments.

We are developing a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy which will include a range of initiatives to prevent and tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in the city, including schemes such as Cambridge Street Aid, Housing First, and Housing Benefit Plus.

***Objective 5 - Improving health outcomes for people on low incomes.***

There are significant health inequalities in Cambridge, with residents in the most deprived ward in the city living 10 years less on average than residents in the least deprived ward. The Council will provide and fund a range of preventative services, including providing access to green spaces, providing a range of free and discounted swimming sessions for people on low incomes, funding free exercise referrals for people on low incomes with health issues, and working with local voluntary groups to promote healthy eating and cookery skills. The Council will also work with local health partners who are responsible for more responsive, clinical services to help improve outcomes for people on low incomes.