

Aberdeenshire Child
Poverty Local Action
Report

2019 – 2020



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



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Joint Statement from Chief Executive Aberdeenshire Council and Chief Executive NHS Grampian

The publication of our second, joint Local Child Poverty Action Plan, coincides with the remobilisation of services as we begin to emerge from lockdown into a very different future. Working hard to reduce inequalities as a result of poverty has always been high on the Public Health agenda, but now more than ever, the impact of Covid-19 compels us to place an even greater urgency on the actions that we need to take to support our communities.

Tackling poverty and addressing inequalities requires a multiagency approach and we have strong relationships and shared values across our Community Planning Partnerships that enable this. The complex origins of poverty require us to be creative in our response and this presents us with opportunities to work in innovative ways with our voluntary sector colleagues too. We will be exploring opportunities within our organisation to support our staff, many of whom may be experiencing the impacts of poverty in their own lives. We want them to feel supported and secure, and to know where to turn to for help. We also want them to be well equipped to identify and respond appropriately to those in their care who are experiencing poverty.

The most important stakeholders in helping us to understand the impacts of poverty and informing our actions to address it are those experiencing it. Children and families have been less visible during lockdown, and for that reason we know that there is a lot for us still to understand about their experiences during that time. What has been particularly difficult for them? What are their fears for the future? What would help them the most? We are committed to listening to the voices of children, young people, and families to help us shape our response to tackling child poverty in Aberdeenshire and you will read about our plans within the report.

We give our full commitment to the Scottish Government's ambition to eradicate child poverty by 2030. Indeed, Every Child does deserve Every Chance.

Jim Savege
Chief Executive
Aberdeenshire Council

Professor Amanda Croft
Chief Executive
NHS Grampian



Aberdeenshire is one of Scotland's 14 rural authorities and is defined as 'mainly rural'. The economy of rural Scotland is both similar to, and tightly integrated with the economy of urban Scotland. However, distinct differences, often related to distance and scarcity, remain between urban and rural economies (Scot Gov, 2018). These differences may contribute to an even greater level of inequality particularly for low income families.

Challenges for low income families living in Aberdeenshire

- Child Care
- Transport
- Sustained Employment
- Digital Access
- Access to affordable credit
- Stigma and perception
- Affordable housing
- Fuel Poverty

Aberdeenshire profile



Aberdeenshire remains a relatively affluent area of Scotland. However, pockets of deprivation and rural isolation nevertheless exist. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) identifies different domains of multiple deprivation across Scotland, in data zones (small areas of around 500-1,000 people) and Aberdeenshire has six data zones in the most deprived 20% in Scotland. Three of these are within the 10% most deprived. These are found in Peterhead and Fraserburgh in the North of Aberdeenshire.

2.1% of Aberdeenshire's population reside in these six zones and are seven times more likely to be employment deprived compared to the average for Aberdeenshire. Five out of the six zones have the most severe household overcrowding problem for all data zones in Aberdeenshire. All six data zones have the lowest pupil attendance rates for school-aged pupils of all data zones in Aberdeenshire.

The levels of child poverty across Aberdeenshire are still lower than the Scottish average .

All wards apart from one are either equal to or below the national average.

The link below outlines the trends over a number of years.

[Aberdeenshire Child Poverty Data – 2014 to 2020](#)

Aberdeenshire data - Child Poverty Profile

The child poverty profile for Aberdeenshire, 2014/15 – 2018/19, highlighted that in 2018/19 4289 of children and young people in Aberdeenshire aged under 16, were living in **Absolute poverty (Absolute low-income families)**.

The data has also highlighted 5,089 of children and young people in Aberdeenshire aged under 16, were living in **Relative poverty (Relative low-income families)**.

Every Child, Every Chance: The Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018-22 highlights the proportion of children within key priority groups are living in relative poverty:-

- Lone Parent families - 36% of children in relative poverty
- Families with 3 or more Children - 30% of children in relative poverty
- Families who has someone either child or parent with a disability - 30% of children in relative poverty
- Minority Ethnic - 37% of children in relative poverty
- Families with the youngest child is under 1 - 32% of children in relative poverty
- Mothers Aged under 25 - 44% of children in relative poverty

Working Principles

Aberdeenshire's approach to reducing Child Poverty focusses on tackling the root causes of poverty and building people's capabilities through income maximisation, employability, improving quality of life, helping families manage the impacts of poverty and promoting positive life chances.

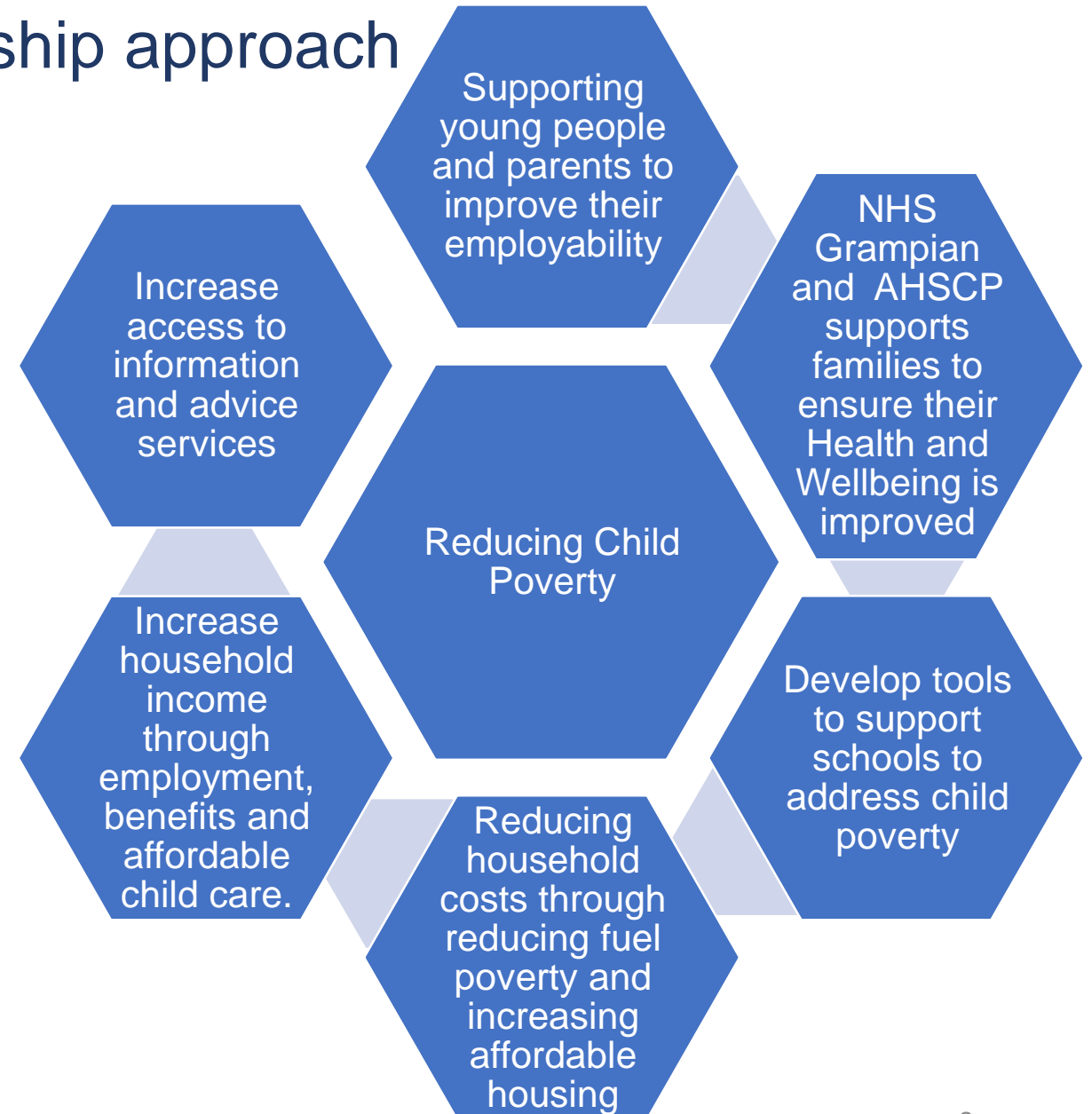
Reducing Child Poverty is also a Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) priority in Aberdeenshire therefore this action plan has been developed collaboratively by Community Planning Partners and has been informed by local voices and lived experience of poverty.



Reducing Child Poverty – A Partnership approach

A commitment has been given by Aberdeenshire Council, NHS Grampian and the wider Community Planning Partnership to ensure this work and plans are informed by the those with lived experience of poverty and action to address child poverty is integrated within all policy areas.

The Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership has 'Reducing Child Poverty' as one of its LOIP priorities and partners are committed to using all the levers available to tackle child poverty including, e.g. employment, procurement, transport.



Developing an integrated approach



Addressing child poverty through a partnership approach offers the best opportunity to ensure that low income families, children and young people to feel valued, respected and supported to access services and opportunities when they need them at a local level.

Through the Fairer Scotland duty Aberdeenshire Council and their partners must also consider the social economic effects of the decisions they make. This reinforces the commitment made to regenerating those areas of disadvantage and support those that are most marginalised. Our [regeneration plans](#) seek to support place based interventions that can reduce the impacts of socio-economic inequality.

Ensuring affordable housing and tackling fuel poverty Tackling fuel poverty are priorities outlined in the [Aberdeenshire Housing Strategy](#). The Aberdeenshire Council housing service is also a partner in the Aberdeenshire Financial Inclusion Partnership which coordinates and delivers information & advice services, income maximisation and increases the up take of benefits ensures families access all the financial support they are entitled to.

Increasing income from employment and earnings should ensure the best support for parents to work and earn more, effectively lifting them and their families out of poverty. These outcomes are developed with the Aberdeenshire Employability Partnership which includes Skills Development Scotland, Aberdeenshire Councils Economic Development and Employability teams.

The Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Strategic Delivery Plan 2020 – 2022 identifies 5 key priorities including Prevention and early intervention; Engagement and Tackling inequalities and public protection and the Aberdeenshire Health Improvement Delivery Plan 2020 – 2022 identifies 5 key priorities, Healthy weight, diet and activity; Improving mental health and wellbeing; Reducing the use of tobacco and harm from tobacco; Minimising the impact of poverty and inequalities and Building resilience and community capacity for health improvement which contributes to Reducing Child Poverty. Commitment to addressing Child Poverty is also an integral part of [Aberdeenshire's Children's Services Plan](#). Partners working through the GIRFEC Strategic Group continue to support digital inclusion, health & wellbeing resulting in improved life chances of all children and young people in Aberdeenshire.

Child Poverty – Integrated agenda

Aberdeenshire's Children's Services Planning

- Families are connected into local support, groups and activities within their community to promote their child's wellbeing and develop lifelong learning
- Raise awareness to Early Years practitioners of the support services/ organisations available to ensure that families on low incomes have access to the correct information, support to access benefits and entitlements.



Reducing Child Poverty Action Plan

- Low income families are accessing support through the lived experience forum, parents are attending Cost of the School Day sessions to support ways to ensure inclusion in education.
- A new helpline has been set up for pupils, parents/carers, and anyone whose employment or learning has been impacted as a result of the pandemic and are looking for information and advice. This is a portal to our all age services with access to one-to-one support with Skills
- Local authority partnerships are enabling the coordination of support to those accessing national or local helplines and services
- Promotion of Scottish Government's online and face-to-face Financial Health Checks. Ensuring the uptake of the Best Start Grant and improve the uptake of Healthy Start Vouchers

Child Poverty – Regional approach

Aberdeenshire Education & Children Services -
Northern Alliance

- Pact Programme delivered by EIS - A package of resources to assist EIS members in schools in keeping the issue of child poverty to the fore at establishment level. The package of resources contains information relating to the causes and details some of the problems that arise in classrooms as a consequence of poverty.
- Workshop to Quality Improvement Officers/Education Support Officers and some Head Teachers - What poverty is in 21st Century Scotland, Looking at legislation around Child Poverty, What poverty may look like in your local area and understanding society's views on poverty.



Reducing Child Poverty Action Plan

- Change perceptions and attitudes to Child Poverty in Aberdeenshire
- Support schools and partners to address Child Poverty through training , resource development and awareness using a range of methods and approaches

Child Poverty – Integrated agenda

Aberdeenshire Housing Strategy

- Improve relations between Gypsy/Traveller and settled communities
- Assist households to maximise their income
- Reduce fuel costs for households across all tenures



Reducing Child Poverty Action Plan

- Gypsy/Traveller families participate in the lived experience forum to ensure their voices are heard and can participate with others in their communities.
- Embedding welfare rights and money advice workers in Primary Care practices has been developed and partly funded through the Housing Service and Health and Social Care Partnership ensuring households can access income maximisation support.
- Families from lived experience forum are working with elected members and energy companies to hold an energy summit to identify ways of reducing fuel costs for low income families.

Child Poverty – Integrated agenda

NHS Grampian and Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership

NHS Grampian has embedded a Financial Inclusion Pathway into practice through routine enquiry within the Universal Health Visiting and Family Nurse Pathway. This includes routine enquiry about finances at pre-birth, 11-14 days, 13-15 months and 4-5 years.

We are working with pregnant women to reinforce the importance of attending antenatal care, with the aim to increase the number of vulnerable mothers eligible and in receipt of the Best Start Maternity grant.

We are endeavouring to put in place an intelligence led and evidence based approach for the Pupil Equity Fund, so that the allocation of funding to schools will help close the poverty related attainment gap.

Reducing Child Poverty Action Plan

Develop mechanisms and appropriate care pathways within Midwifery, Health Visiting, and pre-school childcare services to provide signposting for pregnant women and families with young children to specialist money and welfare advice.

Promotion of Scottish Government's online and face-to-face Financial Health Checks. Ensuring the uptake of the Best Start Grant and improve the uptake of Healthy Start Vouchers.

Along with officers from Aberdeenshire Council's Tackling Poverty and Inequality NHS Grampian officers sit on the GIRFEC Intelligence, Data and Performance Group

Achievements:

What we said we would do

- Roll-out of “Cost of the School Day” training to all 17 School Clusters by 2021.
- Creating a Financial Inclusion Pathway between Midwifery, Health Visiting services, Family Nurse Partnerships and partners providing Financial Inclusion support to expectant and new mothers.
- Promote the Best Start vouchers and vitamins.
- Providing additional free school meals allowance in more schools, including the rollout of the £1 breakfast deal across all Academies.



and what we did

- Sessions have been delivered across Aberdeenshire which engaged with staff, partners, parents and pupils which has resulted in positive changes.
- The Financial Inclusion Pathway has been developed, training has been delivered to primary care staff to ensure mums with children under 1 have taken up all benefits including Best Start Grants resulting in household income increasing for those families.
- There is a recognition that the positive impact of children & young people accessing breakfast is well known and schools have identified that pupils are more prepared for the day a head. The meal deal has been put in place within the majority academies. Some schools have developed local partnerships with supermarkets and third sector which have been used to deliver breakfast and holiday hunger programmes.

Achievements:

What we said we would do

- Creation of a new post of Child Poverty engagement worker.
- Recruitment of 30 families to an online Aberdeenshire lived experience forum.

- Roll out elements of the Health 4 Work Pilot Partnership project to other projects
- Embedding welfare rights and money advice workers in Primary Care practices



and what we did

- Engaging those with lived experience is key to changing the conversation and perception around child poverty. The partners in Aberdeenshire are committed to ensuring a partnership is developed with families to ensure co development and co delivery of services take place. The worker has developed the online Local Voices forum which features as good practice within this report.

- The delivery of using warm handovers to ensure families can access services at the point of contact especially through Primary Health Care setting as been delayed due to COVID-19 however the expectation is this development will be moved forward throughout 2020/21 and beyond.

Impact over the last 12 months.

All 17 academies have introduced programmes to support accessing breakfast. 13 academies have £1 breakfast meal deals.

455 low income families have been supported to access opportunities and services which have improved their lives.

10,396 people have accessed money, debt advice and income maximisation resulting in Client Financial Gain of £8,859,404

The voice of those with lived experience has resulted in an increase in client focused services resulting in an increase in accessibility.

156 young people have participated in training opportunities (16-20-year-olds)

Health professionals promoting the Best Start Grants has resulted in an additional £373,935 for low income families.

Lessons Learned from the last 12 months

The development of the Child Poverty Action Plan has reduced duplication and used resources more effectively. Investing the time to strengthening links across strategies and action plans allowing partners to identify gaps, future trends and areas of collaboration.

Stigma and the perception of poverty is still the number one challenge. Over the last year support and commitment has come from all levels of decision making however changing the public's opinion and view of those living in poverty has been slow.

Child Poverty is a complex area of work and the coordination and collective ownership of this agenda can be challenging for some services and partners however the pandemic has galvanised partners around this agenda.

Areas of improvement



Ensure the voices of those with lived experience continues to be heard, ensuring they have ownership of this agenda especially those who are new to this agenda



Work to develop a more integrated approach with Early Years, Transport, Housing, Regeneration, Health & Social Care Partnership and Education

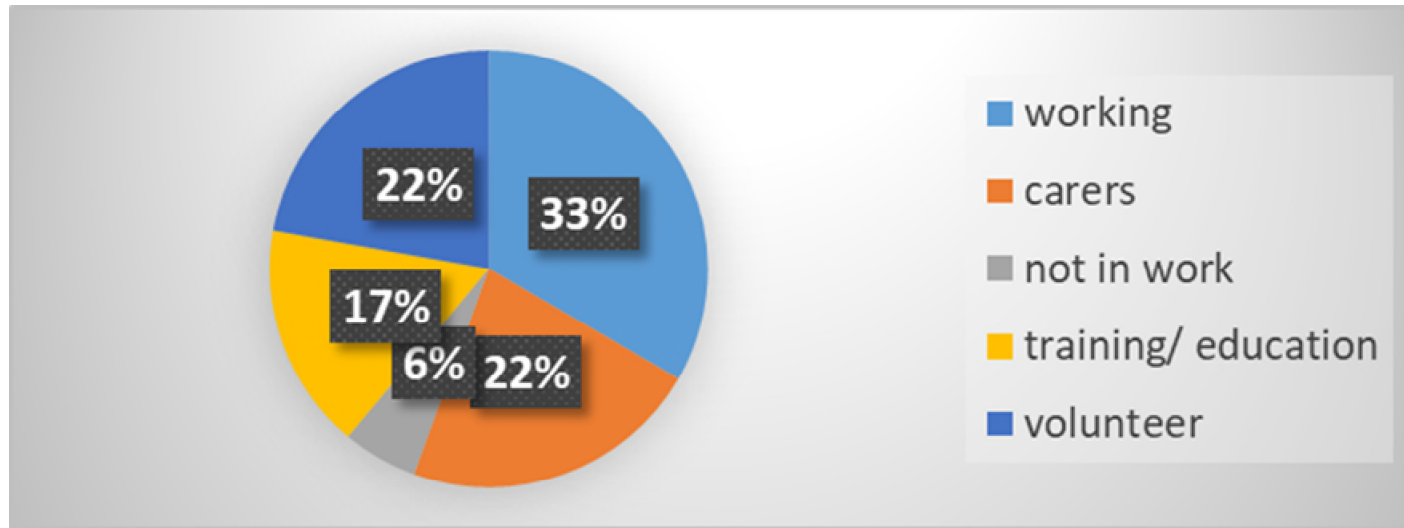


The action plan that addresses Child Poverty is a live document, it contains actions, outcomes, performance measures and targets, here is the latest version of the [Reducing Child Poverty Action Plan](#). The implementation of this plan will be monitored every 6 months to ensure a proactive approach.



Good Practice

- 20 parents and 40 school age children participate in an online lived experience forum
- All households with an income of less than £15,000
- The families are from a range of backgrounds including the travelling community, lone parents, households with an adult or child who has a disability, those that have survived domestic violence and those with English as a second language.
- Only 6 % of parents are not in work, training or volunteering.



Impact of local voices

The views from the forum have challenged services, improved practice and developed training & awareness tools.

One outcome is the development of an Energy Summit which will be part of a range of sessions delivered in poverty awareness week October 2020. This summit will explore why those that have the lowest income pay the most for their energy and what can be done to reduce the inequalities attached to this.

“..the worker has been the most supportive person. She has listened and advised, contacted agencies and appropriate charities on my behalf.” (online member)

Additional engagement has been carried out through social media. During the month of February, the page set up to support this project had 167-page likes; the promoted posts reached 6,755 people, with post engagement by 1,728 families.

During the pandemic local voices have been used as a sounding board and the voice of reason for services that were being redesigned quickly





Local Voices

The COVID-19 lockdown was a stressful time for families and the forum has provided an opportunity for families to express their worries, views and experiences about what is relevant to them at that moment.

The forum asked for direct payment to be given to families who were entitled to free school meals.

This was put in place within 2 weeks of lockdown ensuring 100% of uptake of this entitlement.

As a result of lockdown access to health services including Mental Health and Substance Misuses support was moved to a phone or online .

“I feel nervous about phoning for a GP appointment as it will be over the phone and I have my daughter at home, and I feel uncomfortable speaking about personal health issues with her there (flat is small and no quiet room to hide in)”

Output:

Through 2019/20 9 blocks of the 4-week **Eat Well for Less Parent & Child Cooking** programme were delivered, engaging with 98 vulnerable parents and children.

Outcomes:

- Families have improved their diets by being more confident, enhancing their cooking skills which in turn reduces the family's future health issues.
- Families are more willing & confident to allow children to participate in cooking and associated activities in the home
- Families are better equipped to budget with regards their food costs and prevent financial hardship.
- Participants extended their social connections within the community.
- Participants developed transferrable workplace skills which will meet the needs of local employers.
- Parents are more aware of where they can access, both free and good value food, within their local community.
- Participants are more informed of available online resources to support their learning, and be offered ideas and information

Good Practice - Community Kitchen Project Eat well for less parent & child cooking



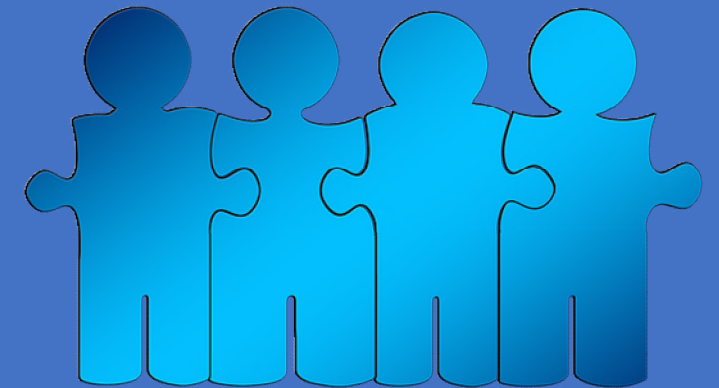
Output:

To embed a Financial Inclusion Pathway into practice through routine enquiry within the Universal Health Visiting and Family Nurse Pathway. This includes routine enquiry about finances at pre-birth, 11-14 days, 13-15 months and 4-5 years.

Outcomes:

- Develop mechanisms and appropriate care pathways within Midwifery, Health Visiting and pre-school childcare services to provide signposting for pregnant women and families with young children to specialist money and welfare advice. This process has supported 756 families to receive a financial health check.
- Increase the number of vulnerable mothers eligible and in receipt of the Best Start Maternity grant.
- A partnership project lead by Kincardine & Mearns Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) , Homestart Kincardine and local health visitors has resulted in 90 families being supported through a period of financial crisis.
- There is increased confidence among health professionals to initiate income maximisation conversations and signpost to support

Good Practice - Healthcare pathways – modelling future practice



Output:

- 4 income maximisation sessions for parents were held in schools to build project awareness, and to raise awareness of best start grants, best start foods, free school meals, clothing grants and neonatal expenses fund.
- 110 parents locally have fed into a research project around childcare and helped to highlight needs, gaps and opportunities to improve the current situation locally.
- 5 promotional events held to publicise the new #shiftthepower fund, where £20,000 will be made available to community groups in Banff & Macduff with thematic focus on Children Survive & Thrive, Mental Health Matters, Gender Justice and A Safe Place to Be.

Outcomes:

- Communities are more widely aware of financial support available. Local staff are better equipped to support local families in applications / queries relating to welfare claims
- Local communities are more aware of the project and beginning to engage
- Foodbanks and local providers are more aware of one another to support the forging of ongoing relationships

Good Practice - Community Works Project – Banff & Macduff:

Opportunities provided locally for voices to be heard on how best to improve local services, and address inequalities online through email, social media and online platforms where necessary.



Output:

The uptake of free school meals and school clothing grants to eligible families was maximised by regularly reviewing uptake and reducing barriers to accessing this support.

Outcomes:

- 2556 young people received free school meals and clothing grants.
- In the 13 Aberdeenshire Academies (secondary schools) an extra £1.00 was added to all Free School Meals (FSM) accounts from 8.00am Mon – Fri until after the morning break. This gives pupils £3.85 per day to spend and allows £2.85 to be spent at lunch (offering the best opportunity of a nutritious meal at lunch).
- At Fraserburgh Academy an additional 50p is added to all FSM accounts, providing pupils £3.35 to spend across the whole day. Fraserburgh Academy have a late morning break service from 11.30 – 11.45 with lunch 12.55 – 13.45, they tend to have a busier morning break than lunch break.
- At 3 Academies (Aboyne, Banchory and Inverurie) the FSM account allowance of £2.85 is available to spend from 8.00am at anytime during the school day.
- The launch of breakfast club has greatly reduced the number of late starts.

Good Practice – Free School Meals



Pupils said.....

“If it wasn’t for the school canteen I wouldn’t have a home-cooked meal. I don’t consider something from the freezer home-cooked”

“I only get a home-cooked meal at home if I make it”

“I go to the canteen everyday it really helps things at home”

Rights Based Plan

Reducing inequalities through action

Recovery Planning – Child Poverty focus

As the result of COVID-19 poverty and inequalities has informed the focus of a number of strategic plans across the Community Planning Partners. This strategic direction provides an opportunity to ensure strategies reflect not only the wider poverty agenda but strengthen the links with reducing Child Poverty.

Improved links and relationships between public, private and third sector partners has resulted in an increase of joint actions and developments within recovery plans.

The following bodies have all revised their priorities in light of COVID-19 -

- Aberdeenshire Council revised priorities:
The principle of tackling poverty & inequalities underpins all six of the new Council priorities underneath the three pillars of Our People, Our Economy, and Our Environment.
- Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership:
The Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Strategic Delivery Plan 2020 – 2022 identifies 5 key priorities including Prevention and early intervention; Engagement and Tackling inequalities and public protection.
The Aberdeenshire Health Improvement Delivery Plan 2020 – 2022 identifies 5 key priorities, Healthy weight, diet and activity; Improving mental health and wellbeing; Reducing the use of tobacco and harm from tobacco; Minimising the impact of poverty and inequalities and Building resilience and community capacity for health improvement.
- NHS Grampian:
The effect Covid has had on children, young people and their families especially around their Health & Wellbeing is an area which is being prioritised. A research study entitled Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on Children, Young People and Families was carried out in collaboration with Robert Gordon University to inform activity and service provision moving forward.

Community Impact Assessments have been co produced and delivered to ensure that the information is relevant, up to date and has not only the partners ownership of the process but the communities. These assessments are being used to identify gaps and future areas of investment which will contribute to reducing child poverty.

Children's rights – Informing change

Aberdeenshire's Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) Partnership are deeply committed to promoting children and young people's Rights. This was highlighted in our 'Very Good' rating for 'Participation of children, young people, families and other stakeholders', in the 2015 Joint Inspection of Children's Services

Aberdeenshire's 2017-2020 Children's Services Plan is based on a firm foundation of Children's Rights, and a commitment to actively seek out and listen to the voices of children and young people to influence future service development.

Children and Young People who are affected by poverty are given the opportunity to be heard:

- Giving a voice – Free School Meals (FSM) – pupils involved at Fraserburgh Academy for increasing the uptake of FSM by getting cash onto their cards for use throughout the day not just at lunchtime meaning they could get food at breakfast and breaktimes. Through the lived experience forum young people were able to contribute to what would work for them when accessing free school meal provision during Covid-19 pandemic.
- Engagement with the youth forums - Aberdeenshire's Gypsy/Traveller representative on Aberdeenshire Youth Council was part of a Government Ministerial working group to discuss educational improvements for young Gypsy/Travellers, met with Young Scot about inclusivity and access to digital platforms and talked with workers across Aberdeenshire Council about Traveller culture, and how they can help challenge prejudice and discrimination.
- Aberdeenshire Children and Young People's Charter has been created by Aberdeenshire's children and young people, for Aberdeenshire's children and young people. The 7 charter statements represent Aberdeenshire children and young people's voices, and reflect what they have told us is most important to them.

Improving outcomes within universal services.

The Child Poverty Action Plan has been informed by low income families who have asked for opportunities and services to be accessible to all. Those with lived experience highlighted that the stigma they feel when accessing services was the main reason for not seeking support

Partners have changed their practice to make every opportunity count as there is a recognition people should not be repeating their story across a range of services to access support. The commitment to ensure families at the centre of interventions, reduces inequalities, increases accessibility and supports a rights based approach to services delivery.

Reducing Inequalities through actions

The Child Poverty Action Plan has been developed to ensure the priority groups identified in our plan are supported to improve outcomes. Most actions will support all 6 priority groups however there are actions which target certain families such as tailored employment programmes, parenting projects and financial pathways and are not offered universally to all families. The following gives an indication of the programmes which support our priority families :-

- Home start North East Aberdeenshire work in partnership with priority families to access advice information and services that improve life skills, core skills and ESOL support to develop community resilience and personal progression within their family structure.
- Aberdeen Foyer delivered a Lifeskills course targeting young parents with children under 3 years. This project was piloted in 2019 resulting in parents increasing their skills, gaining additional qualifications and developing a peer support network.
- In some areas of Aberdeenshire 15% of those low income households with children are the New Scots families who have additional challenges which includes language barriers, employability opportunities and health issues. Support sessions have be delivered to reduce these barriers resulting in 22 parents enhancing their skills to allow them to contribute to the local workforce.



Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 – Partnership response

- New delivery models were redesigned within days which included new ways of working with shared resources. One example was setting up online referral systems and welfare checks for those families that required additional support during lockdown.
- COVID-19 highlighted those services & communities that had resilience and flexibility built in and those which required additional support.
- Additional funding was identified, accessed and allocated quickly ensuring gaps in services were addressed especially around supporting families with home schooling.
- Partnership meetings became solution focused and for a period of time became weekly resulting in stronger links between partners and services ensuring data was share and a responsive approach developed.
- Partners supported each other to continue to deliver services to those most effected by lockdown. The thirds sector reported over 50% of volunteers being lost in the first week of lockdown. However, public sector partners were able to use their resources to fill the gaps.

COVID-19 the impact on progress

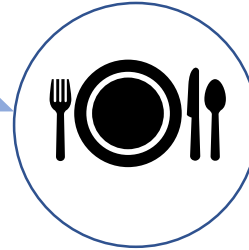
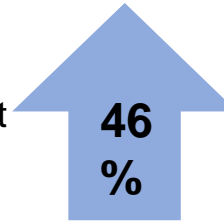
The priority for partners during the first few weeks of lock down changed to ensure that essential services could continue to be delivered for those most effected. The focus was on ensuring households had food and access to sanitary products, household costs were covered, digital access, support for home schooling, financial support and welfare checks and psychological support were in place for those who's wellbeing was being negatively impacted on during this time.

As a result of a change of focus a number of actions within the Child Poverty plan were put on hold. One important development that was halted was the Aberdeenshire Child Poverty Conference planned for early 2020. This event was to challenge stigma, explore option around affordable credit, link partners with lived experience to improve practice and develop a collective ownership of this agenda. This has now developed into a week long series of online sessions which partners will deliver and participate in through the Challenging Poverty Week in October 2020.

Over the past few months there has been a 75% increase in Universal Credit claims. There is a reduction of vacancies which is effecting those that have lost their jobs due to COVID-19. [\[link\]](#)



In March 2020 this year there were 2556 children entitled to free school meals. In July the figure was 3662. A number of families have reported that this is the first time they have applied for financial support. (source: Aberdeenshire Council)



COVID-19 has highlighted the digital exclusion which low income households have experienced resulting in concerns around blended learning especially for those who have children with additional support needs or limited resources. [\[link\]](#)



Evidence of where the COVID-19 pandemic has affected individuals, families, households and communities across Aberdeenshire

Women and Young People are being disproportionately affected as sectors which traditionally have a young and female workforce are reporting that 30% of business have indicated that they may not re open at the end of the furlough scheme. [\[link\]](#)



Measures taken to address the pandemic, including lockdown, early release of prisoners, closure of schools, working from home, reductions in the work of courts and closure of some services and transition of others to remote provision, provide additional tools for abusers to exercise that control, and remove opportunities for those experiencing domestic abuse to seek help. [\[link\]](#). The Grampian Psychological Resilience Hub supported 421 members of the Aberdeenshire public, including 97 children, between April and September 2020.



Children, young people and families are fearful of returning to work, education and traveling outside the home therefore on-going support to build confidence will be required. [\[link\]](#)



Priorities 2020/21

Informed Priorities - feedback

The last few months have also given partners the opportunity to refocus the Child Poverty Action Plan taking into account the impact the pandemic will have over the next few years. The focus actions are to reflect the following feedback -

- COVID-19 highlighted the increased inequalities that low income families have around access to good quality food at an affordable price, digital access and ensuring those that have a disability or medical condition are not left behind.
- Families are worried about the increased debt they find themselves in and are worried about existing and future employment.
- There are concerns around the limited opportunities for training and employment for young people that are leaving education not only in 2020 but for the next few years.
- The Community engagement and flexibility of partners, organisations and services has been valuable to enable services to continue to meet the needs of those that need them the most.
- Early indications of the impact of COVID-19 has resulted in new areas and client groups who have not traditionally found themselves in poverty are now at risk.
- Aberdeenshire Council has taken the opportunity to learn from the past few months to review their priorities – [Aberdeenshire Council priorities 2020](#), as have NHS Grampian, Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership and third sector partners.

Informed priorities and actions

Aberdeenshire Strategic Assessment 2020

Housing has an important influence on poverty and health inequalities in Scotland. This is through the effects of housing costs, housing quality, fuel poverty and the role of housing in community life.

The high *domestic* emission rate per capita suggests Aberdeenshire homes are relatively *energy inefficient*. The high incidence of fuel poverty in the area suggests this is the case.



Experiencing or growing up in poverty affects people's lifelong decision-making style. People living in poverty make decisions based on coping with present stressful circumstances often at the expense of future goals. This means that people may not reach their true potential and never climb out of poverty



Statistics show the incomes of poorer households fell further behind those of middle-income households in recent years, pushing more people into poverty. There is evidence to suggest that low income households – especially families with children – are falling further behind.



Reducing Child Poverty Action Plan

Increase the number of families that received support to reduce fuel costs

Improve support for families experiencing fuel poverty, including increasing targeted referrals for home energy grants support.

Overall, there is an impressive 12% decrease for Aberdeenshire from the previous Scottish Housing Condition Survey statistics. By tenure, 21% of owner-occupied households are in fuel poverty, a decrease 18% from the last stats; 45% of social housing, an increase of 1% and 22% of privately rented households.

Ensure income maximisation, money advice and welfare rights services are accessible, including in rural and remote areas. Embed income maximisation and welfare rights support within services that people living in poverty already use e.g. Primary Care services, Schools, etc. Roll out a Primary Care Link Worker Service (Mental Health and Wellbeing) to support those experiencing mental health and wellbeing issues, including those living in or at risk of poverty.

Consultation with schools to identify a range of effective measures that can be implemented in Aberdeenshire to reduce the inequalities gap which is felt by low income families. Pupil Equity Fund funding can help address child poverty and the impact on families in Aberdeenshire.

Actions for 2020/21 - Areas for further development

As a result of COVID-19 businesses are reporting a concern that they will not financially recover especially the retail and hospitality sectors whose work force are mainly women and young people. Over the last few months we have seen an increase in unemployment figures and a reduction in vacancies. It is anticipated that there will be a reduction in employment opportunities especially for young people, women and those with a disability, some of whom were shielding.

What will we do? Develop targeted training and employment programmes for young people that are leaving education not only in 2020 but for the next few years.

Identify growth sectors such as care and developed sector-based programmes to ensure there is a skilled workforce for future developments.

How? Continue to work with Skills Development Scotland, Employability Partnership and the Education to create employment and training opportunities for these target groups taking advantage of ESF and national schemes.

Support businesses to employ young people women or those with a disability or health condition through a range of incentive schemes.

Impact

- To reduce the risk of young people becoming long term unemployed
- Employers will create opportunities that are targeted at young people ensuring workforce progression within their business
- Reduce the risk of women and those with a disability or long-term health condition becoming long term unemployed and become valuable members within the workplace
- Employers will become flexible and operate family friendly work practices.

Actions for 2020/21 - Areas for further development

COVID-19 has further increased inequalities that low income families have around access to good quality food at an affordable price

What will we do? Develop an Aberdeenshire Food Strategy which will coordinate the activity within this sector, including reduction of waste, employment, growing and access to good low-cost fresh produce. The Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership will lead on an integrated Community Planning Partnership plan for healthy weight, diet and activity.

How? Through work with public, private and third sector partners and local communities to develop the 'field to fork' strategy.

To invest in community and third sector food projects which will meet the aims of the strategy

Impact

- Ensure equity of access to good quality low cost food across Aberdeenshire.
- Ensure the rural economy support and value a local food sector which creates skilled sustainable employment.
- Ensure people can develop and share skills around growing, cooking and the impact food has on Health & Wellbeing.
- Implement the national child and adult health weight standards and pilot community based healthy weight interventions.
- Develop physical activity opportunities for children in Primary and nursery settings.

COVID-19 and the requirement for learning at home has highlighted that many issues that low-income families have around digital access

What will we do? Develop a Digital Inclusion programme which will cover, skills, kit connections and affordability.

How? Working with Tackling, Poverty and Inequality group to map areas of digital exclusion and develop actions to improve and enable digital inclusion

To increase resources through accessing national funding and coordinate local resources to support digital inclusion.

Impact

- To ensure no one gets left behind or excluded from their right to an education
- To support families to realise the benefits that having digital access can bring

Actions for 2020/21 - Areas for further development

COVID-19 highlighted the increased inequalities that those with a disability or medical condition have faced

What will we do? Ensure those that have a disability or medical condition are not left behind

How? Contribute to Aberdeenshire Equality Outcomes for 2021-2023. Work with NHS Grampian to continue to support healthcare pathways.

Impact

- Ensure consideration is given to the impact of societal changes that affect those with a disability accessing services
- To ensure those who have a medical condition are included and supported through a multi-agency approach, including to effectively self-manage their condition.
- Develop physical activity opportunities for individuals with a long-term condition.

There has been an increase in those requiring support due to furlough, redundancies and internships and apprenticeships that ended prematurely due to the strain on businesses

What will we do? Increase engagement with those who have been affected most including young people, and those that have never experience poverty before.

How? Expansion of the lived experience forum and increased number of Advice Workers across Aberdeenshire, not just in areas of deprivation

Impact

- Ensure access to benefits and support agencies
- Enable participation and opportunity to co-develop services and plans.