

Report to Cabinet

15 November 2023

Subject:	Sandwell Tackling Poverty Plan
Cabinet Member:	Leader of the Council, Kerrie Carmichael
Director:	Chief Executive, Shokat Lal
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Senior Lead Officer, Jane Alexander Jane_Alexander@sandwell.gov.uk Strategic Policy Officer, Heather Chinner Heather_Chinner@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations







- 1.1 That Cabinet accept and endorse Sandwell's Tackling Poverty Plan as at out in Appendix 1.
- 1.2 That the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, be authorised to agree the spending of the £1.5m resources allocated to the plan.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Sandwell is the twelfth most deprived borough in the country and the cost of living crisis is being felt by and having a tangible impact on the daily lives of our residents and communities. The Sandwell Tackling Poverty Plan sets out proposals and actions for the council and its partners to work together in a co-ordinated way to address poverty in Sandwell.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People The Tackling Poverty Plan includes actions for supporting children and families
	People Live Well and Age Well The Plan includes actions for addressing health and wellbeing of residents
	Strong Resilient Communities The Plan contains actions for building resilience in our communities, including a network of Welcoming Spaces to address social isolation and a warm welcoming place to go
	Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods The Plan contains actions for addressing warmer homes and more affordable housing
	A Strong and Inclusive Economy The Plan contains actions for improving access to employment and skills support to enable Sandwell residents to take advantage of job opportunities
	A Connected and Accessible Sandwell

4 Context and Key Issues

Background

4.1 The Tackling Poverty Plan is a partnership plan developed by the council and a wide range of partners including health and the voluntary and community sector. It builds upon our long-standing work to support Sandwell residents living on low incomes which includes:

- community based advice alongside the council's welfare rights team and Think Sandwell
- a network of food banks and food pantries
- clear information for residents on the council's website (Resilient Residents and Supporting Sandwell)

4.2 Our overall approach to tackling poverty in Sandwell is

- benefits and debt advice, help with budgeting and employment support
- help to get on-line
- delivering services in the community



- face to face services as well as on-line and phone support

4.3 We are proud of the borough-wide response so far, but collectively partners have recognised that more needs to be done.

Addressing poverty in partnership

4.4 Underlying poverty in Sandwell is a long-standing issue and over time we have developed strong local networks with a focus on building resilience. Partners in Sandwell have been working closely together to respond in this crisis, as we did during the COVID pandemic. We have geared up our joint activity to support the most vulnerable.

- 4.5 The combination of widespread deprivation and structural weaknesses across Sandwell means that our residents and economy are especially vulnerable to the worst effects of the cost of living crisis:
- Sandwell is ranked second out of 333 local authorities on the Centre for Progressive Policy’s Cost of Living Vulnerability Index;
 - the borough ranks twelfth across in the Index of Multiple Deprivation and second specifically on income deprivation;
 - 31,000 households (23% of all households) receive help with Council Tax;
 - a fifth of Sandwell households experience fuel poverty and nearly a quarter report food insecurity.

How we developed the plan

- 4.6 This timeline sets out how the plan has been developed:
- On 13 December 2022, Sandwell council declared a Cost of Living Emergency in recognition of the scale of the impact that the current crisis is having on the borough’s residents.
 - 2 March 2023 – Council convened the first Cost of Living Summit - bringing together more than sixty public, private and voluntary sector partners to coordinate our efforts to support our community through this crisis
 - June – September 2023 development of the Tackling Poverty Plan with a range of partners, overseen by the Resilient Residents Group
 - 6 September – Cabinet workshop held on draft Tackling Poverty Plan
 - 4 October – Council convened the second Cost of Living Summit, launching the Tackling Poverty Plan, with eighty partners discussing our winter plan and identifying areas where we can work together to influence national policy



Sandwell Tackling Poverty Plan

- 4.7 Following the Summit in March, the council and its partners have been working together to develop this Tackling Poverty Plan. The purpose of the plan is to build on all the good work taking place across Sandwell and develop a longer-term approach to addressing the underlying causes of poverty. This is alive document that can evolve as the need and opportunity arises.
- 4.8 Rather than repeating everything we are already doing to support people, the plan aims to identify gaps and areas for further development. This plan is not seeking to capture all the activity taking place but instead is designed to dovetail with other pieces of work such as the emerging Skills and Employment Strategy, Digital Strategy and Youth employment taskforce.

Overall Aim

- 4.9 In addition to dealing with the immediate issues facing residents, the overall aim of the plan is to achieve real change in residents' financial circumstances through increases in household income and reductions in household expenditure. The plan also aims to focus on preventing people who are just about managing, falling into serious poverty through proactive work to support working people.
- 4.10 Actions in the plan are divided into 9 key areas:
- Communication
 - Benefits advice
 - Food
 - Housing and warmth
 - Debt
 - Budgeting
 - Employment and skills
 - Digital inclusion
 - Health and wellbeing

Progress to date

- 4.11 Whilst the plan was being developed, partners have worked hard to make significant progress on delivering some of the actions within the plan. For example:



The Welcoming Spaces Initiative

4.12 Learning from best practice (both nationally through the LGA and the 2022 warm spaces initiative in Sandwell), we will be setting up an on-going initiative, focusing on tackling isolation as well as money worries. We will provide training and support for partners, co-ordination at a town level and funding for those who need it. Welcoming Spaces was launched at the October summit and expressions of interest can now be registered. All of our libraries are Welcoming Spaces.

The Cost of Living Support Programme

4.13 April – August 2023 over 750 people supported from 23 different venues, leading to £114,500 in confirmed gains and 1 person gaining employment. It is anticipated that the programme will be delivered from a number of welcoming spaces.

Resources

4.14 A budget of £1.5 million has been set aside for initiatives linked to this plan.

4.15 In addition, the cost of living support programme has been funded separately. In order to make the best use of this funding it is proposed that the spend will take place over 2 – 3 financial years with the bulk of the spending taking place in 2024/25. Wherever possible we will access any additional funding opportunities to expand our activities and meet unmet need.

Measuring Success

4.16 Measuring success of the plan will take place at three levels as set out in the plan:

1. Measuring milestones and actions in the plan
2. Measuring our overall approach/ ongoing work
3. Tracking outcomes that indicate how the big picture is evolving

Governance

4.17 The following sets out governance arrangements around the plan:

- Overall lead to rest with Leader of the Council and Chief Executive



- Resilient Residents Group to meet 3/4 times a year to oversee the continued delivery of the Tackling Poverty Plan – to be chaired by a senior director of the Council
- Task and finish groups established to implement key actions in the plan
- Progress reports to Cabinet twice a year and informal updates to the Leader on a regular basis
- Establish an annual conference with partners to review progress and plan further initiatives.

Next Steps

The following sets up the next steps in delivering the plan

- Development of partnership communications plan that will inform residents about available support and enable partners to join up services.
- Development of lobbying plan to address high level issues at the most appropriate level
- Set up short term task and finish groups with partners to deliver the key 2023/24 actions in the plan
- Establish implementation plan for 2023/24 actions

5 Alternative Options

5.1 The Tackling Poverty Plan aims to make the best possible use of all the resources that partners bring to supporting Sandwell residents to address the causes of poverty. An alternative would be to not adopt this plan. However, this would risk not adequately joining up our services across Sandwell or enhancing our coordinated approach.

6 Implications

Resources:	£1.5m has been allocated for the delivery of the plan
Legal and Governance:	The proposals are in line with Council policies
Risk:	There are no risks arising directly from this report. Project level risks will be managed at the point of project delivery



Equality:	The proposals in this report are assessed as having a positive impact on people and groups with protected characteristics. The overall aim of the plan is to achieve real change in residents' financial circumstances through increases in household income and reductions in household expenditure. The plan also aims to focus on preventing people who are just about managing, falling into serious poverty through proactive work to support working people.
Health and Wellbeing:	The Plan includes actions aiming to address the health and wellbeing of Sandwell residents and build resilience in the community
Social Value:	There are no social value implications arising from this report. The Plan aims to make the best possible use of all the resources that partners bring to supporting residents.
Climate Change:	The Plan aims to improve the energy efficiency of homes which will contribute towards addressing climate change
Corporate Parenting:	The Plan aims to provide opportunities for vulnerable children and adults.

7. Appendices

The Sandwell Tackling Poverty Plan 2023
Equality Impact Assessment

8. Background Papers

None

