
**Meeting of the Children's Services Select Committee - 11th
September 2023**

Report of the Director of Public Health

Report on Child Poverty

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this paper to provide a summary of Child Poverty in Dudley, and to provide information on initiatives in Dudley to support families living in poverty.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended:
 - That members support development of a system wide strategy coordinating actions to mitigate the impact of poverty on children.
 - That members encourage system participation in the strategic mitigating poverty group.
 - That members join the cost-of-living training opportunity arranged for councillors on 5th October 2023.

Background

3. Children and young people's physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing are significantly shaped by the social determinants of health into which children and young people are born, live, learn and grow. There is a complex interrelationship between the experiences an individual child has in a family and those they experience in the wider community. Negative experiences, both at home and in the community, may mean that children are not only at greater risk of poorer outcomes because of these experiences but also of engaging in harmful activities as they grow up which increase their risks still further. This can perpetuate inequality throughout life and from one generation to the next. It emphasises the importance of addressing the risk factors which make children more

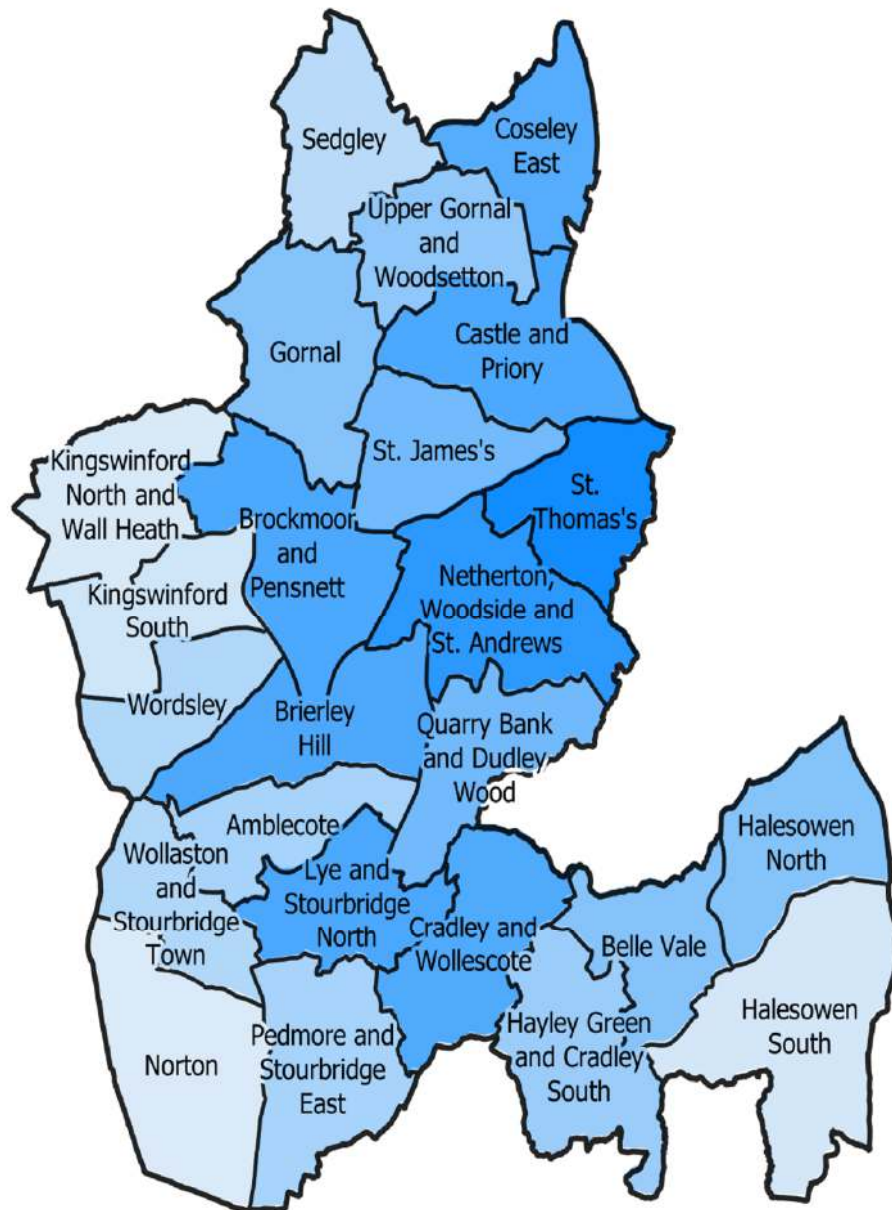
vulnerable at an individual level but also in terms of the causes of wider risk factors in families and within a community.¹

4. Socio-economic disadvantage is one of the main causes of health inequalities in the UK. Factors such as income, employment, education, and community safety contribute around half of modifiable factors affecting health and life expectancy.
5. Poverty can be easily defined as households where expenditure on necessities exceeds income. However, there are a variety of national definitions including relation to mean national income, fuel poverty and eligibility to means tested welfare benefits. Data from 2020/21 indicates that nationally:
 - 25% of children live in low-income households
 - 70% of these children live with an adult who works
 - 40% of people in receipt of Universal Credit are working adults
 - 15% of older people live in low-income households
6. The stress of poverty can hinder children's brain development with lifelong consequences for health and mental wellbeing into adulthood. Poverty is linked with higher infant mortality, low birthweight, and prematurity, with children from poorer households less likely to be ready for school at four, and lifelong impacts on educational attainment and employment opportunities. School attainment, employment opportunities and long-term health conditions all have an impact on socioeconomic status and mental wellbeing.
7. Many of the key health behaviours significant to the development of chronic disease follow social gradient: smoking, obesity, lack of physical exercise, unhealthy diet etc. The current cost of living crisis, coupled with recent Covid-19 pandemic is resulting in ever increasing social and economic inequalities.
8. The current Dudley picture

Indicator	Definition
Relative low income	Households with income below 60% of the median in that year (currently below £18,000)
Absolute low income	Households with income below 60% of (inflation adjusted) median income as it stood in 2011 (currently less than £13,072)

¹ Public Health England (2020) [No child left behind: a public health informed approach to improving outcomes for vulnerable children.](#)

9. Currently, 1 in 4 of Dudley's children live in low-income households, with 1 in 5 living in absolute low-income households. There is geographical disparity across the borough in children living in poverty. The heat map in figure 1 indicates areas of higher numbers of children in low-income families in a darker blue and areas of comparable lower numbers in lighter blue.
10. **Figure 1 Percentage of children living in low-income households, 2022**



- The graph below displays data on the percentage of children per ward living in relative low-income families, ranging from 10.7% in Norton ward, to 43.8% in St Thomas's ward.

Table 1 Percentage of children living in relative low-income families by ward

Ward	Percentage
Amblecote	19.0%
Belle Vale	24.6%
Brierley Hill	33.8%
Brockmoor and Pensnett	34.0%
Castle and Priory	34.0%
Coseley East	32.5%
Cradley and Wollescote	33.3%
Gornal	24.6%
Halesowen North	24.7%
Halesowen South	11.7%
Hayley Green and Cradley South	20.9%
Kingswinford North and Wall Heath	11.1%
Kingswinford South	12.5%
Lye and Stourbridge North	34.1%
Netherton, Woodside and St Andrews	39.4%
Norton	10.7%
Pedmore and Stourbridge East	19.0%
Quarry Bank and Dudley Wood	27.7%
Sedgley	16.2%
St James's	27.6%
St Thomas's	43.8%
Upper Gornal and Woodsetton	22.7%
Wollaston and Stourbridge Town	17.4%
Wordsley	17.4%

What works to reduce poverty?

- There is no quick fix to solving poverty, but several parts of the UK have implemented measures to reduce the impact of poverty in the short term and to reduce poverty in the longer term. This paper highlights three approaches from parts of the UK.

Cost of living crisis in Wales

- Poverty is a longstanding issue in Wales, with almost a third of children living in low-income households. Welsh housing stock is some of the least energy efficient in Europe, with as estimated 45% of households experiencing fuel poverty.

14. The 2023 Child Poverty Strategy for Wales² is currently open to consultation and includes 5 objectives using a Public Health approach to tackle poverty.
 - Reduce costs and maximise family income, including maximising take up of welfare benefit entitlements and the Healthy Start programme, supporting third sector organisations to reduce food poverty and extending provision of free school meals to all primary aged pupils.
 - Creating pathways out of poverty to enable people to fulfil their potential, ensuring all children have the best start in life, ensuring school education is cost neutral, and supporting those with disabilities into good work.
 - Supporting child and family wellbeing, including a child's rights approach across government; prioritising appropriate housing, supporting mental health and ensuring play, sport, and youth opportunities.
 - Building communities, recognising the role of local, accessible services, particularly in rural areas.
 - Challenge the stigma of poverty, enshrining the UN declaration on the Rights of the Child in law, delivering services with kindness and compassion and ensuring all educational settings are inclusive.
 - Collaboration across all services at national, regional, and local level.

Leeds City Council – Cost of Living Response

15. Research demonstrated that the resilience of low-income households to cope with a crisis was becoming weaker, with massive increases in needs for emergency welfare support post Covid-19 pandemic.
16. A Cost of Living and Welfare Board was developed to drive a city-wide solution to welfare provision and addressing the cost-of-living crisis, with a specific focus on food, fuel, housing, and digital inclusion.
17. Targeted interventions were developed including:
 - Heating on Prescription, ensuring that those most at risk of ill health and hospital admissions due to the adverse effects of cold weather could access the Green Doctors service and receive fuel payments where needed.
 - 127 referrals from via Primary care
 - 755 households with a cold related illness were assisted
 - 1116 people were directly assisted to reduce fuel poverty

² Welsh Government (2023) [Child Poverty Strategy for Wales](#)

- The Fire service used social vulnerability index and joint funded winter warm packs to families in need, which included blankets, hats, gloves and scarfs, thermal cup, hot water bottles.
- Workforce Development: Developed resources and training to increase workforce knowledge of the support available in Leeds for fuel poverty and Winter Warmth initiative.

Havering Council – Cost of Living Response

18. In Havering, a third of children live in low-income households, with only a fifth of the population earning the Living Wage. Havering Council partnered with the local NHS to mitigate poverty, with the twin focus to “stay on target” and give “money to those that needed it before they needed it”.
19. The focus was on a specific group of people – those who use high energy medical equipment with long term conditions and disabilities. Using a direct marketing approach, they received 62 applications, including 20 made within the first hour, highlighting the need.
20. Review of the scheme found:
 - Residents were keen to apply, there was very little concern from the public that this could have been a “scam”.
 - People reported that there was an easy application form process.
 - This was an effective use of cost-of-living help services.
21. Havering Council have since developed the model to expand the scope to include more medical equipment and increase the individual funding available.

Dudley position

22. Dudley’s Strategic Mitigating Poverty Group coordinates the system wide actions to prevent and mitigate poverty.
23. In relation to child poverty, local coordination of national initiatives currently supports the following initiatives:

Free school meals

24. 10,5056 school age children receive income related free school meals in Dudley, which equates to 14% of statutory school aged pupils. To receive income related free school meals, families must be in receipt of income related welfare benefits or have a household income less than £7,400 per year. If pupils are in receipt of free school meals, schools also receive a government funded pupil premium to reduce the attainment gap linked to poverty.

Holiday Activity and Food

25. Around half of children eligible for free school meals took part in the Holiday Activity Fund in 2022, with around a third of participants coming from ethnic minority backgrounds. 2,800 children and young people are registered to take part in activities over Summer 2023. Key themes are around food, physical activity, signposting, SEND and supporting families.

Household Support Fund

26. Since 2021, the Department for Work and Pensions have allocated £13,000,000 to Dudley residents via the Household Support Fund. Over half of the government's 23/24 Household Support Fund allocation for Dudley is directed to supporting households with children, with £2,043,393 dispersed over the past 12 months. Proactive support over school holidays has continued with vouchers worth £10 for each child every week of the school holidays issued to families in receipt of free school meals. Family Hubs and School have a pot of hardship funds that they can allocate as required by their families. This has been used for support from a lost bus fare home for a school child to supporting an energy bill for a family.
27. Dedicated funding has been identified for care leavers which has supported with a variety of needs from warm winter clothing to kitchen appliances.
28. Families can also access Household Support Fund via the application scheme, the Cost-of-Living Hubs and community based third sector organisations.
29. *"We didn't know support funds were held via Just Straight Talk until Public Health suggested that we speak with them. Thank you, for supporting the young mom and her baby with such care and compassion to ensure she has a safe home for her baby. I can honestly say I've noticed such a difference in the baby over the last couple of weeks."*

Family Nurse, Black Country Healthcare Foundation Trust

Black Country Food Bank

30. The 12 food banks operating across the borough provided 85,894 meals for children in 2022. In the first 6 months of 2023, demand for support from households with children has increased by 18% compared to 2022.

31. The new Recipe Bag project has launched in Dudley, providing ambient ingredients and a recipe card with a link to a you tube channel showing the family exactly how to cook a meal for a family of four. Through this scheme 500 recipe bags have been provided equating to 2000 meals for families and pupil premium children. 10 recipes are currently 'live' with 10 more in the pipeline. These have also been utilised in a cookery project in partnership with the YMCA targeting child poverty and youth poverty with positive feedback.
32. From September 2023, the Food Banks will be approaching primary schools in Dudley to start cookery sessions with pupil premium families following pilots in Sandwell. These cooking classes will enable families to learn and work together to develop cookery skills and budgeting skills.
33. Due to public donations and funding from DMBC Public Health, the Food Bank has been able to support other third sector organisations with food and toiletry items to enable cooked meals, children's lunches and essential toiletry packs to children including refugee groups, baby banks and youth groups who look after SEND children.
34. Black Country Foodbank report a difficult start to 2023 as the Cost-of-Living Crisis has taken a hold and decreased donations at the same time as increasing demand. To ensure continuity of services, the Food Bank has had to bulk buy food and toiletries using the funding provided by Dudley Public Health.
35. *"This funding has been a lifeline and we are incredibly thankful for the acknowledgement of our services and the support we have received."*
Jen Coleman, Chief Executive Officer, Dudley Food Bank

Brierley Hill Baby Bank

36. In the last year, the Baby Bank have issued 587 packs for expectant and new families, an increase of 54.4% over the past year, and with a value of £700,000 in kind. They have achieved funding from the National Lottery and in-kind support for a van and driver. The volunteers continue to operate in an innovative way to support the support the most vulnerable families in the borough. They have worked with the Council and local NHS to research parents' experiences in the First 1001 Days of life and piloted a reusable nappy project.

Dudley Cost of Living Hubs

37. Dudley and Wolverhampton Citizens Advice have rolled out Cost of Living Hubs across the borough to provide immediate support for households facing crisis. This has been provided in partnership between Dudley Council Public Health and Dudley Health and Care Partnership

Board. 5,719 clients were supported in the first 6 months, with 62% being households with dependent children.

38. The Public Health team and system partner organisations are currently coordinating a system response to mitigate child poverty, by:
- Drafting a child poverty needs assessment and planning a strategic approach to child poverty using evidence-based approaches led by communities.
 - Developing a pathway with NHS and third sector organisations to address infant food poverty in the borough.
 - Working with Children Northeast on pilot programmes to poverty proof maternity and Early Years services, and poverty proofing the school day.
 - Piloting supportive conversations training around financial wellbeing with Family Hub teams.
 - Use Family Hubs and the Start for Life offer as a springboard to increase support in the first 1001 days of a child's life, supporting good parenting and parent and infant mental health.
 - Supporting inclusion in our schools to enable more children and young people to benefit from mainstream education and can engage in training, further education, or work after leaving school.

Finance

39. A total of £500,000 from the Public Health reserves was allocated to support community hardship between 2022 and 2024. The Black Country ICB also supported creation of the Cost-of-Living Hubs via £75k of inequalities funding. In addition, Dudley residents have benefited from over £13 million income from government via the Household Support Fund since September 2021.

Law

40. The Child Poverty Act 2010³ commits the government to reduce child poverty and places specific duties on local authorities to work towards ending child poverty. Specifically, it places a duty on each local authority to:
- cooperate with partners and other bodies to reduce child poverty, and work to mitigate its effects.
 - produce an assessment of the needs of children living in poverty in its area (a child poverty needs assessment).
 - prepare a joint Child Poverty Strategy with relevant partners.

³ HM Government (2010) [Child Poverty Act 2010](#)

Risk Management

41. There are no material risks to the council related to this report.

Equality Impact

42. There is significant inequity with regards to poverty, with children, those living with disabilities or chronic health conditions and those who are carers more likely to experience poverty.
43. This report aims to prioritise those most likely to be impacted by poverty which includes those in groups with protected characteristics.
44. The “Growing up in Dudley” project is due to report in December 2023 and will highlight how children and young people experience poverty. This will be included in strategy development and support the Child Friendly Dudley programme.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

45. Public Health, together with the organisational development team are developing suitable training for councillors, senior leaders and customer facing staff. This will focus on stigma and discrimination regarding poverty and enable staff to have conversations with customers regarding financial matters and signpost to appropriate agencies.

Commercial/Procurement

46. There are no commercial or procurement implications relating to this report.

Environment/Climate Change

47. Measures to mitigate poverty are likely to have a positive impact on environmental sustainability and climate change. For example, improving home insulation reduces both the cost of heating and use of fossil fuels. Improving public transport to meet the needs of those on low incomes also makes public transport more accessible, leading to reduced car use.

Council Priorities and Projects

48. These priorities will support the following Dudley council plan 2022-2025 priorities
 - Poverty is reducing as we address all forms of inequality, improve social, emotional, and mental health and wellbeing.

- Children and young people benefit from the best possible start in life in our Child Friendly borough.
49. This also supports the ambitions of the Borough Vision 2030, levelling up inequalities, tackling poverty, and giving our children the best start in life.
50. Work to mitigate the impact of poverty will have an impact on several council workstreams, including:
- Health and wellbeing, including access to healthcare.
 - Welfare of children, improving educational attainment and parenting capacity.
 - Local deprivation and cost of living.



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