

Sunderland children and families thriving

Child Poverty Strategy 2025-2028



**Sunderland
City Council**

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1. Foreword

Many children in Sunderland continue to grow up in poverty and this has a profound and lasting impact on their health, education, and future life chances.

But this is not an issue confined to our city. Child poverty is a regional and national challenge - one that demands urgent, coordinated, and sustained action.

Sunderland City Council and our partners welcome therefore, the commitment of the North East Mayor and Combined Authority, and central Government to address the causes and impacts of child poverty. Collaborative working at a local, regional, and national level is essential to ensuring every child in Sunderland has the opportunity to thrive.

In September 2024, Sunderland City Council resolved to:

- **Reaffirm** its commitment to reducing childhood poverty by supporting local initiatives that improve the wellbeing of children and families
- **Actively** contribute to regional efforts and align with wider strategies that address the root causes of poverty
- **Advocate** for increased national investment in measures that support families - such as scrapping the two-child limit benefit cap, expanding affordable housing, and improving educational access
- **Establish** a clear monitoring framework with measurable targets to track progress and ensure public accountability
- **Ensure** children, families, and frontline organisations are meaningfully involved in shaping solutions

With this in mind, this strategy starts to set a clear direction for how the council will work with partners and communities to address child poverty based on an approach designed to make a real and lasting difference to the lives of children and their families in Sunderland.

There are many, complex and challenging factors that lead to families struggling to make ends meet and hamper our children and young people thriving and fulfilling their full potential. The development of this strategy makes clear our commitment to understand the causes, issues and lived experiences relating to poverty and our commitment to collaborative action that makes child poverty a thing of the past in our city.



Cllr Michael Mordey

Leader of
Sunderland City Council



Cllr Michael Butler

Portfolio Holder for Children's Services,
Child Poverty and Skills



2. Introduction

Sunderland City Council, alongside our partners, recognises the growing pressures facing many of our residents and we understand the deep and lasting impact that poverty can have on individuals, families, and communities. In Sunderland, over 30% of children are growing up in poverty after housing costs, placing the city among the areas with the highest levels of deprivation in the North East.

Child poverty is not just a statistic, it's a daily reality for too many families across Sunderland. It affects children's health, education, and future opportunities, and it shapes the fabric of our communities. And so we must act with urgency, compassion, and determination.

This strategy represents the council's commitment to working with partners at all levels to tackle child poverty head-on. It is built on the voices of our residents, the expertise of our partners, and the lived experiences of children and families who deserve better. It outlines clear, actionable steps to reduce poverty, support families, and create a fairer, more inclusive city where no child or young person's potential is held back by poverty.

In Sunderland, we believe every child deserves the best start in life, regardless of the circumstances they are born into. Tackling child poverty is not only a moral imperative, it is vital to the health, prosperity, and future of our communities and our city.

Across local government, health, education, voluntary organisations, and the business community, we all have a role to play. This strategy is not the end - it is the beginning of a renewed, united effort to make Sunderland a place where no child is left behind.

This strategy, alongside its delivery plan, sets the framework for a range of local initiatives that enhance the wellbeing of children and families, contribute meaningfully to regional efforts, and align with broader strategies that tackle the root causes of poverty.

We will continue to advocate for stronger national investment in family-focused measures - such as ending the two-child limit benefit cap, expanding access to affordable housing, and improving educational opportunities. A clear monitoring framework with measurable targets will be established to track progress and impact, and ensure transparency. Most importantly, we will ensure that children, families, and frontline organisations are at the heart of shaping the solutions that affect them.



3. Vision and principles

Our vision

Every child in Sunderland can thrive - growing up healthy, happy, and free from poverty and its detrimental impacts.

This Child Poverty Strategy in turn supports the delivery of our broader City Plan vision to create a connected, international city with opportunities for all.

Contributing ambitions include

- Our children and young people achieving the best outcomes
- People living healthier, longer lives with health and wellbeing outcomes significantly improved, and
- Whatever your aspiration, you can achieve it in Sunderland

These, and other City Plan ambitions set the framework for partners to work together with communities to create the social and economic conditions that help create a healthy, prosperous and fulfilling future for our children and their families. Further, our approach is grounded in the Healthy City Plan priorities of Healthy Places, Healthy Communities and Healthy People, ensuring that action on poverty is embedded across all stages of life.

We want a Sunderland where:

- No one lives in poverty or is forced to choose between essentials like heating and eating
- Every child, family, and resident can achieve their potential, free from the stress and limitations that poverty brings
- Tackling poverty is a shared responsibility, and everyone in our city has a role to play

Our guiding principles

These principles set out how we will work together to achieve this vision:

- **Working in partnership** - Addressing poverty is everyone's business. We will harness the strengths of our communities and work across the council, VCSE sector, health services, housing, education, and businesses to create a city where children and families are supported to thrive at every stage of life
- **Prevention and early action** - Acting early is vital. We will support children and families before hardship escalates, reducing the long-term impacts on health, wellbeing, and opportunity
- **Evidence-led and impact-driven** - Our actions will be informed by robust data, local insight, and proven practice. We will monitor progress to ensure lasting change for residents and communities

- **Respect and dignity** - Everyone will be treated with fairness, compassion, and understanding. We will challenge stigma and create a culture where seeking help is met with support, not judgement
- **Lived experience at the heart** - Children, families, and residents with lived experience of poverty will help shape the strategy and its delivery, ensuring it reflects real needs and priorities

Development of the strategy

This strategy has been shaped through close collaboration with residents who have lived experience of poverty and with partners across the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, public services, housing associations, health providers, businesses, and council services.

It is informed by extensive research, data analysis, and direct engagement with people in Sunderland. Through this process, we have built a clear picture of the daily challenges residents face, from the rising cost of living to access to good jobs, housing, and services. We have also identified and celebrated the positive work already taking place in our city to prevent and reduce poverty.

This engagement highlighted both immediate needs and future challenges, allowing us to set clear priorities for the next three years. Importantly, this strategy is a living document. We will continue to listen, adapt, and respond to changing circumstances, ensuring it remains relevant and practical for Sunderland's residents.

Links to other strategies and plans

Sunderland's Child Poverty Strategy has not been developed in isolation. It complements existing strategies and aligns with wider local, regional, and national priorities to create a joined-up approach to tackling child poverty. Positioning the strategy within this broader landscape ensures actions are embedded across services and systems, reinforcing the wider ambitions of the council and its partners.

Locally, the strategy builds on the Financial Wellbeing Strategy (2023–2026) and aligns with the following key plans:

- Sunderland City Plan (2025–2035) - outlines the Sunderland Partnership's vision and ambitions for the city
- Sunderland City Council Corporate Plan (2025–2028) - outlines the council's medium-term delivery priorities under the City Plan
- Core Strategy and Development Plan (2015–2033) - sets the framework for homes, jobs and infrastructure
- Low Carbon Action Plan - supports environmental sustainability and climate justice
- Productivity Plan (2024) - focuses on economic growth, skills and employment
- Digital Inclusion Plan - aims to ensure equal access to digital tools and services
- No More: Our Strategy to End Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls
- Forthcoming Stronger Communities Strategy
- Sunderland Healthy City Plan (2020–2035) (Refreshed July 2025)
- Forthcoming Skills and Employability Strategy



The above list is not exhaustive, and alongside others, the above plans and strategies provide a strong foundation for action, with child poverty reduction embedded across multiple areas of work. For the council's part, the aim is to ensure that tackling child poverty runs as a golden thread through every decision we take and every investment we make, across a wide range of policy areas. Aligning funding streams and priorities in this way helps to maximise impact and deliver lasting change for children, young people and their families.

Regionally, the strategy aligns with the North East Combined Authority's (NECA) commitment to tackling child poverty, as set out in the published Child Poverty Reduction Unit (CPRU) Action Plan. This plan highlights the importance of coordinated action across the region. It identifies child poverty as a shared priority. Sunderland has a key role to play in contributing to this collective effort, ensuring local actions support and are supported by wider regional goals.

Nationally, the UK Government is expected to publish a new Child Poverty Strategy in autumn 2025. It will outline national priorities across four key areas:

- Increasing incomes
- Reducing essential costs
- Improving financial resilience, and
- Strengthening local support

While the full details are yet to be confirmed, a national child poverty strategy will support the work of local authorities and their partners to address poverty.

This child poverty strategy for Sunderland is well placed to align with this national direction. By identifying where local work already contributes to these priorities and where government action is needed to go further, the council can ensure it is ready to make the most of future developments, working alongside partners. This includes strengthening existing activity, addressing local gaps, and creating the conditions for national policy to have maximum impact for children and families in Sunderland.

4. Talking about poverty and what it means to Sunderland

Defining poverty in the local context

Clearly defining poverty is a vital part of this strategy. It involves setting out what poverty means specifically in Sunderland, understanding how it impacts children, families, and communities, and identifying the underlying drivers. A shared local definition helps build common understanding across the council and its partners and provides a foundation for more coordinated and effective action.

A clear definition also plays an important role in reducing stigma and challenging misconceptions. While there is no single agreed-upon definition, poverty is widely understood as a lack of financial resources most often measured by whether household income is sufficient to meet basic needs and enable full participation in society.

This strategy is informed by local engagement with families, partner organisations, and council teams, who shared what poverty looks like in people's day-to-day lives. People described how this affects every part of life, leading to stress, stigma, isolation, and a constant sense of uncertainty. These pressures don't exist in isolation, they interact and build over time, making it harder for families to move forward or access the support they need.

People spoke about the realities they face and the ways that systems often fall short:

"I am worried how I'll manage when my youngest turns three, I'll have to work extra hours to continue with my universal credit claim but my boss says they can't increase my hours"

A Sunderland mam with two children

"I keep getting told in interviews that I need experience to get a job, but without a job how can I get the experience?"

A focus group with Sunderland young people

"I look after my granddaughter three days per week during the day and then I go to work in the evening". I also help my daughter and her husband by buying food for them and clothes for my grandchild" A Sunderland grandparent



Understanding the impact of childhood poverty

Poverty in childhood is about growing up without enough money to meet basic needs or access everyday opportunities. It can mean missing out on school trips, uniforms, transport, or digital access barriers that affect confidence, wellbeing, and learning. These pressures place additional strain on families already struggling to stay afloat.

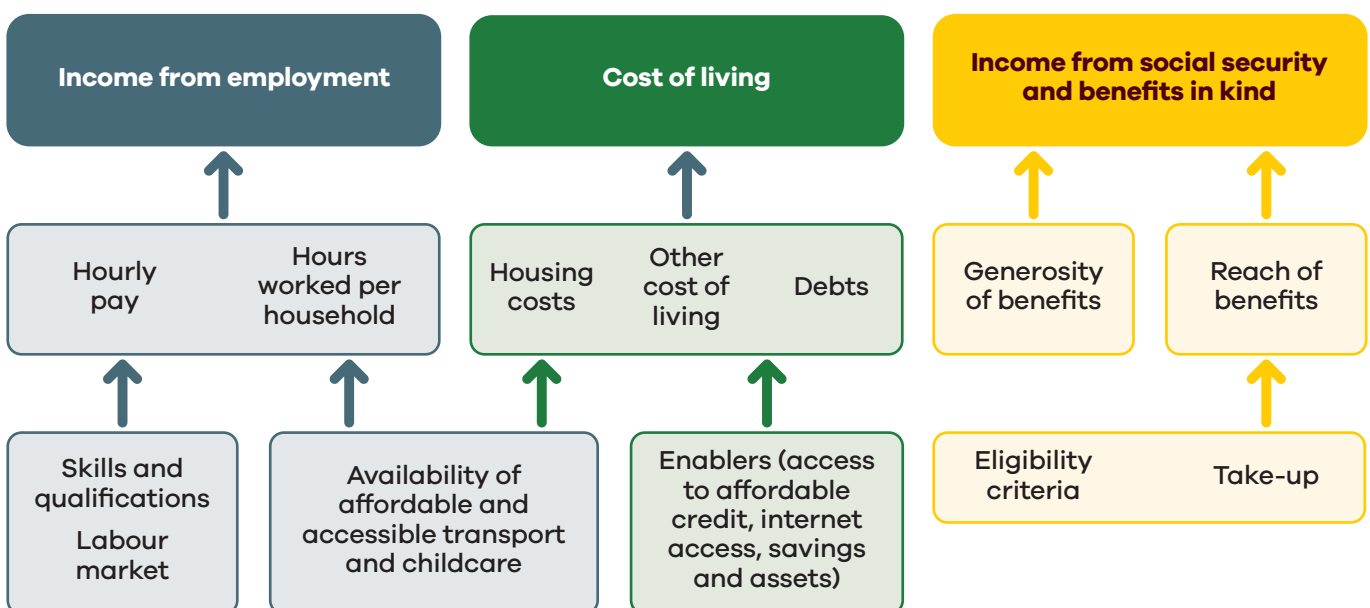
Poverty also creates barriers to cultural and social participation, limiting children’s ability to take part in activities, connect with peers, and build the skills and networks that help them thrive. It can restrict access to education, training, and community opportunities, reinforcing cycles of exclusion. In addition, children in low-income households are often more exposed to environmental challenges such as poor air quality and lack of green space, all of which can affect health, wellbeing, and resilience.

Without early intervention, the effects of childhood poverty on health, education, and prospects can last into adulthood. This strategy supports action that prevents harm, reduces long-term disadvantage, and gives all children the chance to thrive.

An intersectional approach to tackling poverty

Poverty is not experienced in the same way by everyone. Some groups face overlapping disadvantages that combine to create deeper and more persistent barriers. For example, lone parents, disabled people, care leavers, minority ethnic communities, and unpaid carers may experience the combined effects of low income alongside discrimination, inaccessible services, or a lack of tailored support. These intersecting factors can limit opportunities, reduce resilience, and make it harder to break the cycle of poverty.

Drivers of poverty



Adapted from: Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018–2022 (ISBN 9781788517317)

Poverty is about lacking the financial resources to meet essential needs and participate fully in society. It is driven by a combination of factors that interact and compound disadvantage, particularly for those already at risk of financial insecurity. While many of the levers to address them sit with national government, local

authorities and their partners have a vital role in reducing their impact and supporting those most affected.

This strategy draws on the above established model, which identified three core drivers of child poverty:

- Insufficient income from employment
- Inadequate income from social security and benefits in kind
- Rising and unequal costs of living

Insufficient income from employment

Work is not always enough to lift families out of poverty, 68% of working-age adults in poverty live in households where someone works (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2025). In Sunderland, many families face insecure employment, limited hours, and few progression opportunities. These challenges are particularly acute for lone parents, disabled people, care leavers, and others who face additional barriers to work. Lack of flexible jobs, affordable childcare, or reliable transport makes it harder to access good-quality employment, leaving many residents stuck in low-paid work with no clear route to financial stability.

Inadequate income from social security and benefits in kind

The social security system plays a critical role in supporting families, but it often fails to provide enough to meet rising living costs. Policies such as the two-child limit benefit cap, and high deduction rates from Universal Credit reduce families' disposable income and deepen hardship.

Administrative barriers such as complex application processes, limited access to advice, digital exclusion, and a lack of awareness result in many people missing out on support. Policy in Practice (2024) estimates that £22.7 billion in income-related benefits and social tariffs go unclaimed each year across the UK. More than 1.4 million people are missing out on over £8 billion in financial support.

Rising and unequal costs of living

The cost of essentials such as food, energy, housing, and transport continues to rise, disproportionately affecting low-income households. These families spend a much higher proportion of their income on basic goods and services, leaving little margin for unexpected expenses or saving.

In Summer 2025, seven million low-income families were going without essentials - a term the Joseph Rowntree Foundation uses to describe households where at least one member has recently experienced food insecurity or, within the past six months, been unable to meet basic needs such as adequate clothing, heating, toiletries, essential household repairs, healthcare, or making essential journeys. This figure has not fallen below seven million since October 2022, with food remaining the most common essential to be foregone

What we heard from residents in Sunderland

Families told us they want support that is easier to find and access, services that treat them with dignity, and a city where children have the same opportunities no matter their postcode or background.

To ensure the strategy is shaped by the people it affects the most, the council carried out engagement with parents, carers, children, and young people across the city. This included sessions at Family Hubs, parent and carer panels, a Youth Council meeting, and conversations with young people at Sunderland College. The engagement built on existing insight gathered through Together for Children and through city-wide surveys.

The voices of people with lived experience are not only the foundation of this strategy but will continue to guide its delivery and development, ensuring it remains rooted in real people and families in Sunderland.

Key Themes

Rising living costs

Families spoke of the increasing pressure caused by the cost of essentials, especially food, energy, transport, and childcare. Many parents described making sacrifices, such as cutting back on heating, internet, clothing and even meals, to make ends meet.

Gaps in support

Those just above benefit thresholds said they feel left behind, with little to no help despite struggling. Some working families, including professionals, described being pushed to the edge financially during maternity leave or changes to employment. Eligibility criteria for schemes like free childcare or the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme were described as unclear or unfairly restrictive.

Childcare and work

Childcare costs were repeatedly raised as a barrier to work or increasing hours. Many families relied on grandparents or relatives for informal childcare even when those relatives were also working. Parents reported that formal childcare was sometimes unavailable in certain areas or unaffordable, making work unviable.

Accessing support

There was widespread confusion around where and how to access help. Parents said support often felt hidden or not intended for them. Some weren't aware that the Family Hub sessions they attended count as support, while others didn't access help because they assumed they wouldn't be eligible. Families asked for services to be promoted more clearly and made easier to navigate, including outside of typical working hours.

Mental health and stress

The pressure of trying to manage financially was a major source of anxiety. Many families described how long NHS waiting lists and delays in accessing care for themselves or their children had worsened their mental health. Parents of children with

SEND or additional needs reported a lack of dedicated support, and that they often feel isolated or exhausted.

Stigma and frustration

Families said they were reluctant to seek support due to fear of judgement or embarrassment, particularly when it came to services like foodbanks or clothing banks. Many shared that working hard often didn't feel "worth it," and some voiced frustration that others seemed to receive more support without contributing. This sense of stigma and perceived unfairness added to their feelings of exclusion and disillusionment.

Children and young people's opportunities

Children and young people shared a strong desire for more free or low-cost activities, youth clubs and safe spaces to meet friends. Parents echoed this, asking for more play spaces and family events across the city. Young people also talked about wanting better access to mental health support, career advice, volunteering opportunities and work experience to help them stay and succeed in Sunderland.

Barriers linked to place and transport

Some parents described living in areas where services and childcare were harder to access and highlighted specific wards with fewer childcare places or poor-quality outdoor spaces, noting how this limits opportunities for children. Others said long or unreliable bus journeys made accessing childcare or work more difficult, particularly when support networks were no longer nearby.

Ongoing engagement

Sunderland City Council is committed to ensuring that residents with lived experience continue to play an active role in shaping how the strategy is delivered, monitored, and developed over time.

We will continue to listen and respond to the views of local families and work alongside partners and community organisations to ensure that our approach remains grounded in real experiences.

Our ongoing commitment therefore includes:

- Creating regular opportunities for families and young people to share their views on key decisions
- Working with trusted community partners to facilitate conversations and gather insight
- Offering flexible and inclusive ways for people to participate, including through local events and targeted outreach
- Recognising and valuing the time, expertise and experience of those who contribute
- Ensuring engagement is meaningful, with a clear link between what people tell us and what we do

5. Sunderland profile

Our approach is shaped by the reality that while many drivers of poverty sit with national policy, local leadership, working with partners across the city and the North East region, can make a measurable difference now and over the long term.

We have set out a list of primary and secondary measures, which will be used to monitor the impact of this strategy. Progress against these measures will ensure we achieve the ambitions set out in the strategy.

There is no single, perfect way to measure poverty. It requires a combination of measures and conversations with residents to build a full picture. Our primary and secondary measures are drawn from commonly used, publically available data which allows us to compare trends over time and between other areas.

These measures will be supported by more detailed administrative data that helps us understand the impact of poverty on different communities and neighbourhoods in the city. This approach will also assist a timely understanding of our progress, given some of the measures below are only updated periodically.

Profile

	Sunderland	England
% of children in relative low income families (before housing costs)	29.0%	22.0%
% of children in relative low income families (after housing costs)	32.0%	31.0%
% 16–17 Year olds not in Education, Training or Employment	4.8%	3.2%
% children in workless households	8.2%	10.0%
% residents who are economically inactive (age 16–64)	23.3%	21.3%
% children eligible for Free School meals	30.9%	25.7%
% of 16–64yr olds claiming unemployment-related benefits	3.9%	4.0%
Median gross weekly pay	£648	£604
% residents qualified to NVQ level 3 or above	49.2%	57.6%
% residents with no qualifications	13.0%	6.6%
Average cost of private rented property (monthly rent)	£673	£1,399



q r s t u v w x y z

Singular just one person			Plural More than one person		
1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
I	You	He/She	We	You	They
Me	You	His/Her	Us	You	Them

Commonly
mis-spelled
words

hole and whole
which and witch

pass and pass

you're, your
of, off

through and though

right and write
they're

great and grate

no and know

and other rare words,
prefix and suffix.

Try the word
game for the right
most useful words.

6. Key themes and priority actions

Key goals and strategic pillars

Based on our commitment to work with partners and communities to address child poverty, this section sets out the key goals that underpin the strategy, alongside the strategic pillars that will guide delivery. Together, they provide the framework for the accompanying Delivery Plan, which will outline the specific actions to be taken and how progress will be measured.

A great deal of positive work is already underway to support families, reduce hardship, and improve life chances for children. While this strategy cannot capture every initiative, it brings together the priorities identified through engagement with residents, partner organisations, and council teams. These will shape collective action across the city and help coordinate efforts to maximise their impact.

The Delivery Plan will be reviewed and updated annually to reflect the city's changing needs and to track progress against the goals set out in this strategy.

Vision: every child should thrive

Goal one:

Prevent and reduce child poverty

Goal two:

Mitigate the impact of child poverty

Goal three:

Improve partnership working

Strategic pillars

Income maximisation

Service access and inclusion

Early years and family support

Equity in education

Work, skills and opportunity

Goal 1 - Prevent and reduce child poverty

The strategy's primary goal is to tackle the root causes of child poverty through early intervention and preventative action.

- Builds on the Financial Wellbeing Strategy's emphasis on strengthening financial resilience, with a sharper focus on maximising household incomes - lifting families out of poverty now and preventing those at heightened risk from falling into it in the future
- Addresses the wider determinants of poverty - including income (e.g., creating pathways into secure, well-paid work), cost of living (e.g., improving access to affordable childcare and education), and income from social security and benefits in kind (e.g. ensuring families can access local welfare support when needed)

Goal 2 - Mitigate the impact of poverty

The second goal is to reduce the immediate and harmful effects of poverty on children's health, wellbeing, and opportunities.

- Aligns with the Financial Wellbeing Strategy's focus on supporting households in hardship through coordinated access to essentials, services, and financial help
- Aims to ensure families can meet basic needs and that children are not disadvantaged because of their circumstances
- Works to remove barriers that prevent children from accessing the support, stability, and opportunities they need to thrive

Goal 3 - Strengthen city-wide and regional partnership working

The third goal is to deepen collaboration within and across the council, public services, VCSE organisations, businesses, and local communities, recognising that tackling child poverty is everybody's business.

- Builds on the enabling work of the Financial Wellbeing Strategy to make system-wide improvements that have a lasting impact
- Calls for shared ownership of this strategy across all sectors, ensuring it is not simply a city council initiative but a collective commitment to change
- Aligns with regional priorities and activity across the North East, ensuring Sunderland's efforts contribute to and benefit from wider work to reduce poverty and improve life chances. This includes sharing learning, pooling resources where appropriate, and engaging with regional networks to strengthen advocacy for the city's children and families

Examples of progress to date

Established 39 Databanks across Sunderland who distribute free SIM cards to individuals for whom data costs are a barrier to connectivity

Strategic partnership between BornGood (city device recycling initiative) and Together for Children's Virtual School to supply free laptops to looked-after children aged 16–18 who lack access to devices, supporting ongoing education and preparation for independent living

Delivery of the Money Guiders self-development programme to help organisations or individuals give safe, effective guidance to residents

Sustainable Affordable Food Club Project supporting more Community Stores, Community Pantries and Social Supermarkets as an alternative to Foodbanks

Sunderland Household Support Fund provided £16 million to households

Six eSports hubs established across the city, providing e-gaming access for young people, and staff and volunteer training to highlight career, education, and employment pathways within the gaming industry

Increased welfare advice funding into local and accessible services to reduce waiting times for appointments

Council Hardship Scheme supporting replacement boilers for vulnerable residents who do not qualify for Eco-funding

Delivered the Donate a Device campaign encouraging residents to donate unused tech for redistribution to families in need, helping bridge the digital divide

Lightning Reach – launch of a financial support portal to support residents to apply for a wide range of personalised support in one place

Promotion of social tariff awareness to households in receipt of welfare benefits, leading to significant monthly household savings

Strategic pillars

To deliver on the three goals set out in this strategy, Sunderland’s approach is structured around five strategic pillars. Each pillar reflects priorities identified through engagement with residents, council teams, partners, and regional stakeholders, and is supported by targeted actions.

These pillars will be delivered in collaboration with partners across the city and the wider North East, maximising available resources and reducing duplication, and at a national level - ensuring Sunderland benefits from, and contributes to, regional and national initiatives to reduce child poverty. This includes sharing learning, aligning with relevant government programmes, and influencing national policy and funding decisions that affect children and families in Sunderland.

The five strategic pillars set out in this strategy provide the framework for tackling child poverty in Sunderland. They help to address the root causes, reduce immediate impacts, and create long-term opportunities for children and families. Each pillar combines local action with regional and national collaboration, ensuring Sunderland’s approach is joined up, evidence-based, and responsive to the needs identified by residents and partners, and is deliverable within legal frameworks and budget allocations.

Strategic Pillar 1 - Income maximisation

This pillar focuses on ensuring households have the financial resources they need to meet essential costs and live with stability and improve overall health and wellbeing. It prioritises maximising incomes through increased benefit take-up, access to financial advice, tackling the poverty premium, helping to reduce families outgoings/ expenditure, and to help build financial resilience, whilst also addressing the health impacts of financial insecurity. Actions will also strengthen local and regional advocacy for improvements to the national social security system.

We will:

- Use the administrative data we hold and effectively share data with our trusted partners to provide straight forward access to essential support for families, especially those near eligibility thresholds, ensuring that no one falls through the gaps
- Strengthen the provision of independent advice on financial wellbeing, debt management, and health-related financial support (affordable prescriptions etc.) by improving the pathways for residents to access guidance and related services, particularly through community-based settings
- Review and improve local financial assistance processes to prioritise direct and effective support, encouraging innovative approaches to addressing poverty.
- Collaborate with our partners and VCSE organisations to address the challenges of high-cost credit and by promoting initiatives that include affordable credit options to help build lasting financial inclusion and improved health outcomes among residents
- Reduce financial barriers to accessing healthy, affordable food by linking income maximisation and financial support schemes with community food provision and local healthy eating initiatives

- Advocate at local, regional, and national levels for a stronger and fairer social security system, aiming for broader reforms that benefit individuals and families experiencing poverty

Strategic Pillar 2 – Service access and inclusion

This pillar is about ensuring all residents can access the support and services they need without unnecessary barriers. It addresses the complexity, fragmentation, and inaccessibility that families experience, aiming to create a coordinated, compassionate, and inclusive service offer. It also focuses on improving collaboration across local, regional, and national systems.

We will:

- Work with housing providers and strategic partners to improve the quality and availability of affordable, healthy homes, addressing housing-related health issues (such as damp and mould) and maximising opportunities for investment that enhance living environments and promote better physical and mental health outcomes
- Embed Making every contact count as our approach across the system to ensure residents are offered the right support early regardless of where they access support
- Improve accessibility and awareness of support by simplifying access routes, providing inclusive communication (including translated and sensory-accessible materials), embedding poverty awareness training for all public-facing staff, and strengthening signposting through trusted routes such as VCSE partners, community spaces, schools and social media

Strategic Pillar 3 - Early years and family support

This pillar focuses on giving children the best start in life by strengthening support for families during the early years. It promotes accessible, affordable childcare, integrated family support services, and early identification of needs to prevent problems from escalating. It also ensures Sunderland’s work connects to regional and national priorities for early years provision.

We will:

- Promote a healthy start for children by ensuring all women have timely access to high-quality pre- and post-pregnancy support, including maternity care and health visiting services
- Build on the reach and impact of the Family Hub model, expanding the network and service offer so that all families can access integrated early years and parenting and health support. For example, we are putting additional funding into Family Hubs to support people with children to stop smoking and to promote the benefits of quitting
- Promote early identification of need in early years settings and ensure services are designed around the needs of families, informed by lived experience. This includes recognising and responding to the impact of trauma, poor mental health, substance use and domestic violence through stronger links between health services, schools and community organisations

- Enhance preventative health measures including breastfeeding support, health education into early years services to improve long term outcomes for families

Strategic Pillar 4 - Equity in education

This pillar aims to remove poverty-related barriers to learning and ensure all children can succeed in education. It focuses on reducing the cost burden on families, tackling stigma, and expanding access to enrichment activities. It also seeks to influence regional and national policy to address the links between poverty and educational attainment.

We will:

- Work in partnership with primary and secondary schools, and our further education providers to remove economic barriers that prevent equal access to learning opportunities for all children
- Support all education providers in developing approaches that promote accessible learning opportunities and reduce the effects of poverty on student participation and achievement
- Encourage the provision of enrichment activities outside of regular school hours to ensure all children can benefit, regardless of background
- Advocate for policy changes and additional funding at regional and national levels to tackle the financial challenges faced by families in education

Strategic Pillar 5 - Work, skills, and opportunity

This pillar aims to ensure parents, carers and young people can access secure, good-quality work and the skills they need to live well, access opportunities and have an aspirational future. It addresses barriers to employment, promotes fair work practices, promotes best practice within workplaces and supports those not in education, employment, or training. It also connects Sunderland's efforts to regional and national work, health and skills strategies.

We will:

- Reduce barriers for parents/carers accessing work and training, through links to the Adult Skills Strategy and national employment programmes, and by working with partners to highlight childcare availability and affordability as a local priority
- Improve access to affordable, flexible and high-quality childcare for all families by working with partners locally, regionally and nationally to strengthen provision, influence policy, and ensure parents and carers can enter or remain in work or training. This includes collaborating with NECA on the Regional Childcare Strategy and engaging with the Department for Education on future childcare reforms.
- Encourage employers to recognise their role in tackling child poverty by promoting good work practices across the city, including Living Wage accreditation, disability confident employers, the Better Health at Work Award (BHAWA), and the NECA Good Work Pledge (SHINE).
- Maximise support to young people not in education, employment, or training, reviewing current provision to ensure it meets their needs and potential. This will also be aligned with national skills and youth employment policy

- Improve access to digital resources and connectivity to improve skills and enhance access to future opportunities

A cross-cutting enabler - The socio-economic duty (SED)

The socio-economic duty (SED) is a high-level policy tool that supports all five strategic pillars and underpins the achievement of all three goals.

Sunderland City Council's adoption of the duty enables all services and departments to consider decisions and practices through an anti-poverty lens - a 'poverty-aware approach'. This reduces the risk of the Child Poverty Strategy becoming siloed and ensures every part of the council plays a role in achieving its aims.

This commitment applies to all future strategic decisions, including commissioning, project and policy design, and operational processes such as procurement and recruitment. It also guides the reconfiguration of existing services and functions.

Implementation will draw on learning from good practice across the North East and beyond, demonstrating local progress ahead of the anticipated national enactment of the SED next year.



7. Governance

In delivering the Sunderland City Plan 2025–35, addressing child poverty is a fundamental aspect of partnership efforts to build stronger communities where all residents have a sense of belonging and pride in the city, and access to wide-ranging opportunities in relation to health and wellbeing, learning and skills, employment, housing and culture.

In the council's Corporate Plan 2025–28 which sets out our medium-term strategic priorities, the following are included in a set of outcomes that are 'everyone's business' and the collective responsibility of all service areas.

- Increased prosperity for the whole of the city's population with reduced poverty and greater financial resilience
- An inclusive, cohesive city for everyone who calls Sunderland their home and those who visit, work, learn and invest in the city
- The health and wellbeing of all the city's residents is significantly improved, inequalities are reduced, and everyone has the opportunity to lead a healthy and happy life.

The ongoing development of the Child Poverty Strategy and the monitoring of its delivery will therefore be undertaken by a Corporate Child Poverty Board, with clear links to governance and delivery arrangements for the Stronger Communities and Health & Wellbeing agendas.

Chaired by the Children's Services, Child Poverty and Skills Portfolio Holder, and supported by the Corporate Strategy function, the Board will comprise representatives from:

- Strategy & Corporate Affairs (including Stronger Communities and Skills)
- Children's Services/Together for Children
- Public Health & Wellbeing (including Financial Wellbeing)
- Elected Members (representing each area of the city)

Performance Management

The impact and performance measures set out in Section 9 will help ensure that activities are being delivered and impact is being achieved.

Oversight and monitoring will be undertaken by the Corporate Child Poverty Board through the provision of impact reports on a six monthly basis, with progress against relevant KPIs also included within the council's quarterly performance management arrangements and reports.



8. Delivery Plan

Activities to deliver our Child Poverty Strategy in 2025–2026 are set out below under each of the strategic pillars



Strategic Pillar 1 Income maximisation

- Identify and support families at risk, ensuring no one falls through the gaps
- Lead a multi-agency partnership project to auto-enrol eligible children for Free School Meals
- Arrange financial, employment and training support for families on a 1–1 basis - offering signposting to more bespoke financial advice and affordable credit options to reduce reliance on high-cost credit
- Work with partners to streamline access to hardship funds, food banks, and emergency support, ensuring families receive timely, effective help
- Provide free meals and activities during school holidays (HAF programme)
- Supporting Citizen’s Advice deliver the School Gates project by providing access to the Device Bank, offering families access to a digital devices, data, one to one support, and raising aware of discounted broadband scheme
- Implement and embed data sharing arrangements with foodbanks/crisis food and fuel providers and advice agencies
- Increase information sharing and joint activity via appropriate networks and Forums including Food and Advice Providers Forum, Sunderland Poverty Action Group , Good Food Charter Steering Group
- Improve targeted actions and communications to identify residents currently missing out in relation to benefits and support - to deliver targeted campaigns (e.g. through Lightning Reach)
- Provision of financial inclusion and budgeting/money advice (includes the targeting of specifically vulnerable residents)
 - children in poverty
 - those suffering from mental health
 - patients suffering for cancer and their families
- Continue the city-wide advice and digital line to improve accessibility for residents, especially those who are working
- Embed and evaluate the outreach model of the Welfare Rights Service in key support areas as part of the Provision of Advice and Guidance in Community Settings and Schools e.g. Family Hubs, Mental Health settings, and supporting women/girls with domestic violence

- Support Citizens Advice Sunderland in their delivery of Advice at the School Gates
- Promote the Lightning Reach financial support portal to increase accessibility to digitally excluded residents and connect them with wider support
- Pilot and roll out the Money Guiders initiative across the city
- Expand the reach and impact of Lightning Reach through a targeted, inclusive and community-driven approach
- Manage legislative changes in relation to Universal Credit/Welfare to Work
- Deliver the £4.7 million in Household Support Fund 7 programme - to benefit over 26,000 households
- Development of a new Crisis and Resilience Fund to support
 - Provision of effective crisis support
 - Improving individuals' and local communities' financial resilience
 - Enhancing community level support
- Develop revised crisis support payment arrangements for those on low incomes that experience financial shocks and provide a gateway from these contacts to wrap around support services to help support residents with underlying issues
- Provide financial support to help with rent or housing costs - replicating Discretionary Housing Payments
- Promote access to affordable credit - through access to a Credit Union and raising awareness of the dangers of illegal money lending
- Work with employers in the city to provide an employee financial wellbeing offer
- Procure a new Affordable Credit contract partner to operate in the city
- Work with FareShare, Feeding Britain, The Bread & Butter Thing, and other key agencies to support development of affordable food options and reduce reliance of foodbanks
- Work with Sunderland Foodbank and other food aid organisations to improve access to foodbank provision in the city, and to wider support
- Continue to develop and extend Affordable Food Club models and capacity
- Promote the North East Warm Homes one stop shop service working closely with Energy Savings Trust
- Implement auto-enrolment for Free School Meals
- Supporting people to have financial security by accessing benefit entitlements
- Support residents' use of self-serve financial wellbeing tools
- Increase engagement with local support services through Links for Life and increase take-up of the Links for Life offer with inclusion of Family Hub, early help and prevention services information on the platform
- Support residents to access the warm homes local grant and connect them to advice and support to reduce energy bills
- Increase sign-up to the Good Food Charter Action Plan and Affordable Food Clubs.
- Implement the Healthy Weight Strategy



Strategic Pillar 2

Service access and inclusion

- Support families with housing issues (damp, mould, overcrowding) and work with housing providers to improve living conditions and health outcomes
- Provide clear signposting, inclusive materials, and poverty awareness for families in community settings through Wear Here 4 You Events
- Equip homes with Internet of Things (IoT) sensors in bathrooms to monitor building integrity and occupant behaviours to assess whether behavioural changes can help prevent mould and damp issues
- Work with housing colleagues to ensure that they promote access to LR for all tenants to ensure they have access to a wide range of support
- Provide Making Every Contact Count Financial Wellbeing training to VCS organisations in order to support and signpost residents
- Implement new contract arrangements at first tier level for welfare rights and financial wellbeing advice 2025 to 2028 to maximise residents' income. Enhance Community Level Support by:
 - Increasing awareness of local support/services including web-based information
 - Development of co located services
- Deliver the Warm Homes Local Grant by retrofitting at least 150 low-income, energy-inefficient homes with measures such as solar panels, insulation, and efficient heating systems to reduce fuel poverty, cut energy bills, and improve living conditions
- Deliver the Energy Savvy programme to support 3,300 households between February 2025 and March 2027 through home visits, community events, and telephone advice
- Train health and social prescribers in energy and retrofit advice to maximise Make Every Contract Count referrals
- Assess homes for Warm Homes Local Grant and ECO4/GBIS eligibility, aiming to increase uptake of whole-house retrofits
- Install solar Photovoltaic arrays in up to 14 primary schools to cut energy costs and boost climate resilience
- Work with schools and partners through the Great British Energy Solar Partnership to maximise funding and accelerate solar and energy efficiency measures
- Continue to undertake Health Visitor Home Assessments
- Expand the use of Technology Enabled Care to support people to live at home



Strategic Pillar 3

Early years and family support

- Deliver targeted support through the Early Years Additional Fund to children identified with, or at risk of, emerging SEND needs
- Collaborate with partners to implement the Early Years Identification Programme, proactively identifying and supporting children with additional needs from birth
- Deliver health education initiatives in schools, with a focus on promoting oral health and toothbrushing
- Facilitate access to expert advice and guidance from Public Health professionals for schools on health education topics
- Provide a wide range of health and wellbeing activities for families, including antenatal support, maternity clinics, health visiting, bonding sessions like baby massage and stay & play, peer support for new parents, breastfeeding help, and parent-focused sessions such as yoga
- Continue to support to families through the five Family Hubs and eight spokes citywide, offering activities including Stay & Play, Sensory Room, Smoking Cessation, Antenatal Yoga, and parenting programmes
- Continue to develop deliver health services that identify needs early, offer trauma-informed support, and address mental health, substance use, and domestic abuse, through specialist groups and direct home support
- Integrate health education, breastfeeding support, and preventative health measures into early years activities and support
- Provide access to a Smartphone and 12 months free data to survivors of domestic abuse
- Continue to review, embed and evaluate the outreach model of the Welfare Rights Service in key Family Hubs
- Promote the Healthy Start Programme, including healthy vitamins, delivered through maternity and health visiting services
- Continue to supplement health visiting services in the city with two extra visits undertaken at 3–4 months and 3–4 years, to provide additional support where needed and school readiness
- Continue to deliver support, through the Family Nurse Partnership to parents aged 19 and under, working with them until baby is two years old
- Continue to deliver the peri-natal mental health offer across the city for women who need support with emotional and mental wellbeing
- Ensure families can access their benefits entitlement in full, including the Healthy Start Programme
- Continuing, through Family Hubs to support people with children to stop smoking and promote the benefits of quitting

- Continuing, through Sunderland Communicates Together to deliver a multi-agency approach, in one place, to speech, language and communication support at the earliest point possible
- Continue to deliver the Gro-Brain initiative to enhance parent-infant bonding and improve children’s mental health
- Develop integrated visits between health visitors and early years providers to improve decision making in relation to school readiness and understand support requirement in the early years setting
- Implement the Families First pilot in the Coalfield area of the city to support families as early as possible, through multi-disciplinary teams, to prevent escalation to statutory safeguarding services
- Roll out a phased implementation of the Families First Programme, providing multi-agency support for children and families at a neighbourhood-level
- Target Best Start services to families who need extra help - reaching out to more families, and improving digital access
- Continue to deliver the Breastfeeding Friendly Sunderland programme, including access to infant feeding support
- Increase the number of Breastfeeding Friendly venues where breastfeeding is supported
- Continue to introduce Family Support Workers to the hospital A&E department to provide support, advice and guidance for families with the aim of reducing repeat attendances
- Implement the Healthy Places Programme across schools to improve health and wellbeing of pupils, staff and wider school community
- Strengthen support for schools through further development of the Healthy Places approach
- Continue to deliver the Peer Supporters programme within Family Hubs, providing support around infant feeding, parenting and perinatal mental health



Strategic Pillar 4 Equity in education

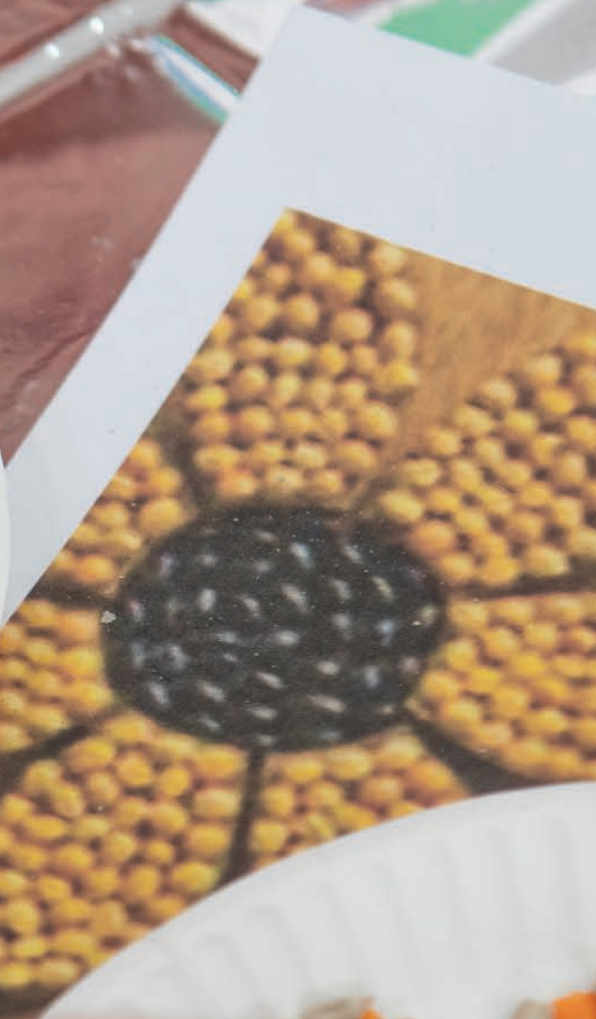
- Work alongside schools to design and implement an auto-enrollment process, ensuring eligible pupils are automatically registered for free school meals
- Provide a comprehensive training programme through the School Improvement Service to support teachers and practitioners in raising pupil participation and achievement
- Promote continuous professional development and excellence in teaching practice
- Collaborate with schools to deliver the National Wraparound Program, offering extended support to communities before and after the school day
- Collaborate with schools to help professionals signpost families to appropriate partners, ensuring access to support that reduces the impact of poverty on participation and achievement
- Collaborate with schools to ensure every child has access to a digital device
- Support households by promoting discounted broadband, introducing digital tools like Lighting Reach, and encouraging enrolment in adult learning opportunities such as Skills Start courses in English, Maths, and Digital Skills
- Deliver Computer Coding Clubs to support residents with the opportunity to develop skills in the digital industry including pod casting, coding and gaming
- Equip six VCSE hubs with dedicated gaming suites to provide community access to Esports and offer progression routes, signposting participants towards educational and employment opportunities
- Work with Sunderland College to train staff to ensure they have knowledge and information to advise students and their families
- Work with educational settings to integrate health and wellbeing topics across all levels of education, and encouraging schools to include active lifestyles, nutrition, and stress management in the curriculum.



Strategic Pillar 5

Work, skills and opportunity

- Conduct a termly childcare sufficiency assessment to monitor and highlight capacity and provision within Sunderland, exceeding statutory requirements
- Partner with schools and private providers to deliver business support and guidance, expanding opportunities for pre- and after-school provision
- Implement phases two and three of the national School-Based Nursery programme to increase the availability of childcare places
- Support schools to participate in the National Breakfast Pilot Programme
- Offer guidance on childcare options at all five Family Hubs and work with partners to enhance local provision ensuring families have access to high-quality, affordable childcare
- Support every child in the city to understand their post-16 options and support any NEET or those at risk of being NEET to access education, employment, or training
- Offer support that tackles digital poverty, such as providing free sim cards with pre-loaded data
- Support pathways to progression at six Digital Health Hubs through North East Economically Inactive Trailblazer Fund, to support socially excluded young people who are not in education, employment or training to access opportunities
- Deliver a pilot project to develop proof of concept for the In-work Benefit Welfare Rights Advisers
- Deliver an awareness campaign to promote childcare vouchers and childcare support
- Continue to develop initiatives to support care leavers with financial well-being advice
- Launch phases two and three of the Lightning Reach financial support portal implementation plan to increase accessibility to digitally excluded residents and connect them with wider support
- Increasing uptake of the funded childcare offer
- Maximise opportunities in the 'Get Britain Working' programmes and workstreams
- Encourage and support participation in the Better Health at Work Award through the Workplace Health Alliance
- Promote 'Shine' - the North East's employer accreditation scheme - to city employers
- Develop and deliver the Sunderland Digital Inclusion Plan



9. Impact and performance measures



Strategic Pillar 1 Income maximisation

Impact Measures:

- Child poverty rate
- Benefit claimants
- Low-income households
- Disposable income
- Financially digitally included
- Affordable Food Club take up and reach
- Financial gains
- Children living in relative low-income families (under 16s)
- Children living in absolute low-income families (under 16s)
- Average weekly earnings
- Gambling Harm - gambling premises per 100,000 population
- Households in fuel poverty
- Children eligible for free school meals

Key Performance Measures:

- Devices awarded through device banks, SIM cards activated, 1:1 support provided
- Residents supported by food banks
- Residents supported to maximise their income through council funded advice services
- Local Welfare Provision Awards: Crisis Support & Community Care Support
- Number of individual awards processed for Discretionary Housing Payment
- Total processed expenditure on Discretionary Housing Payment
- Total Local Welfare Provision Expenditure
- Residents supported by welfare rights advice
- Housing law advice cases



Strategic Pillar 2

Service access and inclusion

Impact Measures:

- Housing affordability ratio
- Household Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings
- Increasing and maintaining registration and footfall in all five Family Hubs across the city
- Healthier homes
- Accessible digital services with well supported pathways
- Residents accessing advice services
- Households accessing advice to reduce their energy bills
- Resident savings through reduced energy bills
- Homes retrofitted to increase energy performance and resilience
- Food insecurity reduction
- Households in temporary accommodation (per 1,000)

Key Performance Measures:

- Affordable homes numbers
- Private rental inspections for hazards
- Assisted technology in the home levels
- Number of residents accessing the accessibility tool



Strategic Pillar 3

Early years and family support

Impact Measures:

- Children in Need Rate
- Child Protection Plan Rate
- Cared-for Children Rate
- Children identified and supported through the Early Years Notification Panel
- Increase in eligible families accessing funded childcare hours
- Families with identified financial concerns at the start of Early Help or Social Care plans whose financial situation is resolved or improved by the end of support
- Residents connecting to vital crisis services
- % of children achieving a good level of development at the end of reception
- % of children achieving a good level of development at the end of reception - with free school meal status
- Hospital admissions for dental caries (0–5 years)
- School reception age children - prevalence of overweight including obesity

Key Performance Measures:

- Breastfeeding initiation and continuation rate
- Smoking at time of delivery
- Health visits (new birth and 2–2.5yrs)
- Percentage of five-year-olds in Sunderland achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)
- Free School Meal cohort supported to engage in Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) activities
- Number of mobile telephones issued
- Smoking at the time of delivery rate
- Breastfeeding at 6–8 weeks rate
- A good level of health development (2–2.5 year review)



Strategic Pillar 4 Equity in education

Impact Measures:

- Education attainment and outcomes for children at key stages
- Auto-enrolment for Free School Meals
- Level of Pupil Premium funding
- Educational attainment, skills attainment and adult learning outcomes
- Skills attainment through clubs and hubs across the city
- Additional resources and funding secured
- Percentage of children achieving the expected level in the phonics screening check in year 1
- Percentage of children achieving the expected level in the phonics screening check in year 1 - with free school meal status
- Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) rate
- Attainment 8 score
- Attainment 8 score - children in care

Key Performance Measures:

- School holiday activities (HAF) take-up
- Attainment gap between pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and those not eligible
- Key Stage 2 results
- GCSE performance
- Number of adults reporting an increase in digital confidence
- Number of mobile devices issued
- Number of households digitally connected
- Number of attendees at clubs and hubs across the city reporting an increase in digital confidence



Strategic Pillar 5 Work, skills and opportunity

Impact Measures

- Employment rate
- Numbers of residents paid Living Wage
- Qualification levels
- Digital connectivity (broadband accessibility)
- Number of residents responding 'life is worthwhile' (in surveys)
- Skills attainment
- Economic growth rates
- Digitally inclusive communities rating
- Economically Active rate
- Economically Inactive rate
- Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF4) levels
- Rate of residents with no qualifications
- Gap in employment rate between those with a physical or mental long term health condition (aged 16–64) and the overall employment rate

Key Performance Measures

- Adult skills and learning programmes achievement rates
- Links for Life support rates
- Mental health & suicide prevention training rates
- Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) rate
- Number of socially excluded young people supported into education, employment or training
- Number of residents using Wi-Fi and footfall rates

Appendix One

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