

# Foundations for Change: **Tackling Poverty** 2025 - 2026

APPENDIX 1





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## Foreword by the Leader



Barking and Dagenham is a borough built on resilience. From our proud working-class roots to our vibrant, multicultural present, we are a community shaped by change, driven by ambition, and united by a deep sense of belonging. As someone who was born and raised here, I know firsthand the strength and spirit that define our people.

Today, our borough is growing faster than almost anywhere else in the country, which is a testament to the connections we forge and the welcome we extend.

But alongside this growth, we face a stark and urgent challenge: poverty. Four in ten children in Barking and Dagenham are growing up in poverty. That is not just a statistic; it is a call to action. It speaks to the daily struggles of families trying to make ends meet, of children going to school hungry, and of communities stretched thin by years of rising costs.

We have seen the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost of living crisis, and the ways our borough has been

tested like never before. But in the face of adversity, we stood together. We mobilised to support our residents with food, financial support, digital connectivity, and care when it was needed most.

This document, *Foundations for Change: Tackling Poverty*, is our next step. It recognises that while we are determined to act locally, the direction of travel on poverty is often shaped by forces beyond our control. Against a backdrop of flux and fragility, we must be agile. The work we begin today must be capable of evolving tomorrow.

That's why this document focuses on what we can do right now to build on the progress we've already made and identify ways to strengthen collaboration across council services. It sets out targeted interventions designed to break down the barriers faced by those most impacted by poverty and lay the groundwork for effective, long-term partnerships that deliver real change.

At the heart of this work is a commitment to fairness. We know that poverty does not affect everyone equally. Structural inequalities mean that some in our community face greater barriers than others. Our mission is to tackle those inequalities head-on, ensuring that our efforts uplift those most disproportionately affected.

We know that no single organisation can tackle poverty alone. But by laying strong foundations, grounded in our values, our history, and our shared commitment, we can build a future where every resident has the opportunity not just to survive, but to thrive.

# Introduction - Our Vision for the next 12 months

## **Tackling a complex problem like Poverty is a system-wide issue.**

While the Council, through the services it delivers and commissions, is an important lever for tackling poverty – our sphere of influence is limited. Vitally important is the role of partners (including health and VCSFE), and the strengths of our communities themselves.

It is also evident that – despite the best intentions of those stakeholders who operate within the borough – the overall direction of travel regarding poverty is dictated largely by national and international factors, and policy of central government. The current context is one of uncertainty and change – with the governments child poverty strategy pushed back until autumn 2025 and anticipated changes to topics such as the two-child benefit limit or winter fuel allowance.

Austerity has been a defining challenge for local government, with councils under sustained pressure to make savings amid shrinking budgets. We have innovated over the past decade, with some success, but rising demand and constrained resources have inevitably limited our capacity to address the deep and widespread problem of poverty in the borough.

Limited resources mean we are largely focusing on emergency support for those that are hardest hit. However we want to develop a more expansive approach to tackling poverty. To facilitate this, we are developing a test-and-learn approach to support our understanding of effective interventions.

In this environment of rapid change, any work we embark upon now must remain flexible and responsive. With that in mind – this document will focus on how in the short-term we reflect on poverty as a Council, create the space to collaborate across services, and align ourselves to prepare for the longer-term work with partners and the community. The diagram overleaf outlines how we plan to approach this.



## How does this fit within the wider strategic context?

Poverty in Barking and Dagenham, from its root causes to its symptoms, cannot be addressed in this document alone. Numerous interlinking strategies across all council services, such as employment, families, and equalities, work together to remove barriers and support our most vulnerable residents. Therefore, it is crucial that this work is guided by shared principles and a unified vision to ensure we maintain a cohesive strategic approach to drive significant changes in this area. When creating a space to focus on poverty, key stakeholders from these various areas of work will be invited to join the conversation to ensure dependencies are identified and actioned.

The Council also holds levers that can be used to support this agenda – including through how it procures and supports social value, and as a large employer in the borough. Work that takes place in these areas must reflect our aims and aspirations for tackling poverty.

The learnings from the work that takes place over the next year will link with and inform the emerging **Neighbourhoods** programme that the Council and Partners will be embarking upon in 2026/27 – which will aim to give residents and communities a stronger voice in regards to the services they receive.

# Setting the Scene

## Poverty and Deprivation

Poverty and deprivation are distinct but directly related. People may be living in poverty if they lack the financial resources to meet their needs; while those facing deprivation may be lacking a wider range of resources – not just income. This includes employment, health, education, safety, housing and living environment. While the focus of much of this document is on alleviating and addressing causes of poverty, it is hoped that any learnings or successes will have a wider impact on deprivation.

## What are the impacts of poverty?

The impact that poverty has on the aspirations and attainment of those living in Barking and Dagenham is immense. Without access to essentials – food, decent housing, clothing – we know that residents aren't be able to meet their other needs – and this impacts their ability to live a good life. This is illustrated by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (below):

National data sets show that poverty and deprivation are drivers for many challenges- they correlate with increased prevalence of child abuse and neglect<sup>1</sup>, domestic abuse<sup>2</sup>, damp and mould<sup>3</sup>, obesity<sup>4</sup>, and impact the ability of children to learn<sup>5</sup>. There are also clear links between deprivation and health outcomes, including increases in cold related mortality, malnutrition, deaths of despair and mental health crises<sup>6</sup>.

We must recognise that our efforts to tackle these different challenges cannot be successfully sustained while the levels of poverty increase in the borough.

Finally, the impacts of poverty disproportionately impact certain cohorts more than others. Black and minority ethnic people are 2.5 times more likely to be in relative poverty, and 2.2 times more likely to be in deep poverty (having an income that falls more than 50% below the relative poverty line), than their white counterparts.<sup>7</sup>

Only 45% of single parent households were financially resilient<sup>8</sup>. Single parents (9 out of 10 are women) spend considerably more of their disposable income, are more likely to be in debt and are more likely to have a disability.<sup>9</sup> Those that do have disabilities are more likely to be unemployed<sup>10</sup> or in insecure work<sup>11</sup>, and are impacted more by fuel poverty.

More than 600,000 disabled people in the UK are estimated to have less than £10 per week to pay for food and other costs. According to the 2021 Census, approximately 28,993 people in Barking & Dagenham reported having a disability. This represents about 17.9% of the area's population.



Our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion cannot be met without addressing these growing inequalities.

## **What's the current context?**

The current (and ongoing) cost-of-living crisis, arising following the COVID-19 pandemic, has worsened deprivation that has existed in Barking and Dagenham for decades.

In 2021, inflation in the UK rose sharply, with CPI reaching a peak of 11.1% in October 2022. The impact of this was severe, particularly on households for whom a larger proportion of their income was spent on essentials. In December 2022, over 3 million low-income households could not afford to heat their homes.<sup>12</sup> The cumulation of rising prices means that our residents face a much higher cost-of-living than they did in 2021. Households that were struggling before have been the most severely affected.<sup>13</sup>

In Barking and Dagenham, we have seen the effects acutely.

The borough is ranked 27<sup>th</sup> worst in the country when looking at a combination of 10 different poverty indicators, which include unemployment, benefits, homelessness, child poverty and more.

The borough currently holds the third-highest unemployment rate in the country, reflecting a persistent lack of access to stable and well-paying jobs. This economic instability is compounded by educational disadvantage: Barking and Dagenham has the highest proportion of adults in London with no formal qualifications. The absence of qualifications not only limits individual earning potential but also restricts access to further training and

employment opportunities, creating a cycle of disadvantage that is difficult to break. These factors contribute to a wider pattern of inequality, where residents face barriers to upward mobility, poorer health outcomes, and reduced life chances. This is reflected in the fact that this borough has the lowest household income in London (£43k). 42.2% of children aged 16 and under live in relatively low income families (during 2022/23). This is the 4<sup>th</sup> highest in London and 21<sup>st</sup> highest in England.

## **What has the Council been doing?**

Since the height of the cost-of-living crisis in Autumn 2022, a range of crisis support and intervention has been put in place for the most vulnerable, alongside the continued support from established services in Barking and Dagenham. As a result, thousands of residents have received some form of assistance – be that hardship funding, employment support, affordable credit provision, access to emergency food or being connected with help in the community.

This emergency response to the cost-of-living crisis built on the strong foundations already in place – including long-standing partnerships with local civic society. This support has, undeniably, been a lifeline for many of the most vulnerable residents in the borough. But now we stand on a burning platform – a tipping point where we must consider how we work moving forward.

## **What's on the horizon?**

Household disposable incomes after housing costs are expected to remain £400 a year below 2020 levels in April 2025, and that by then, households will be a further £1,400 worse off on average than they are today. For the lowest income families, incomes are falling twice as fast than for those who are better off.<sup>14</sup>

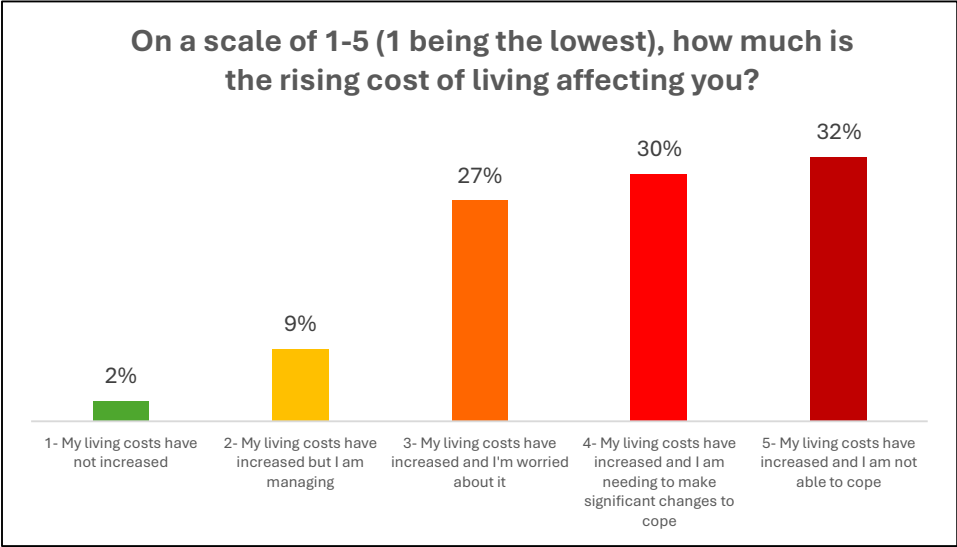
Under current benefit policy assumptions, relative poverty is set to rise, especially for children.<sup>15</sup> The number of children living in relative poverty is projected to rise by 1.5 million to reach 4.6 million by the end of the decade.

However, we are operating in a context of national legislative change. It is widely anticipated that the Autumn Budget 2025 will see incoming changes to the welfare benefits system and other hardship support – potentially including the two-child benefit cap. The impact of poverty and deprivation is not going to disappear, but it is a changing landscape. We need to act now – but anticipate these changes and be ready to respond.

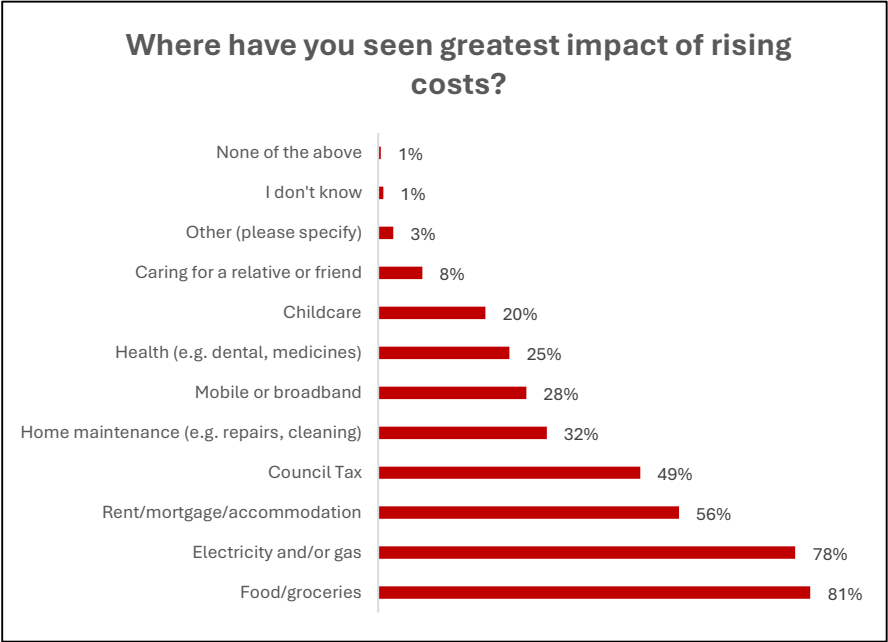
# What have residents told us?

## The Cost-of-Living Survey

Between June 2023 and May 2025, **over 5,250 residents** have answered questions about how the changes in the Cost-of-Living have impacted them over that time. Their answers paint a picture of sustained pressure - and point to a variety of ways in which the high cost-of-living is impacting them.



When asked to quantify the degree to which the rising cost-of-living has impacted them, 32% of residents have told us that they cannot cope with their increased living costs (the most common answer). A further 30% have told us they have had to make significant changes to their lives to cope.



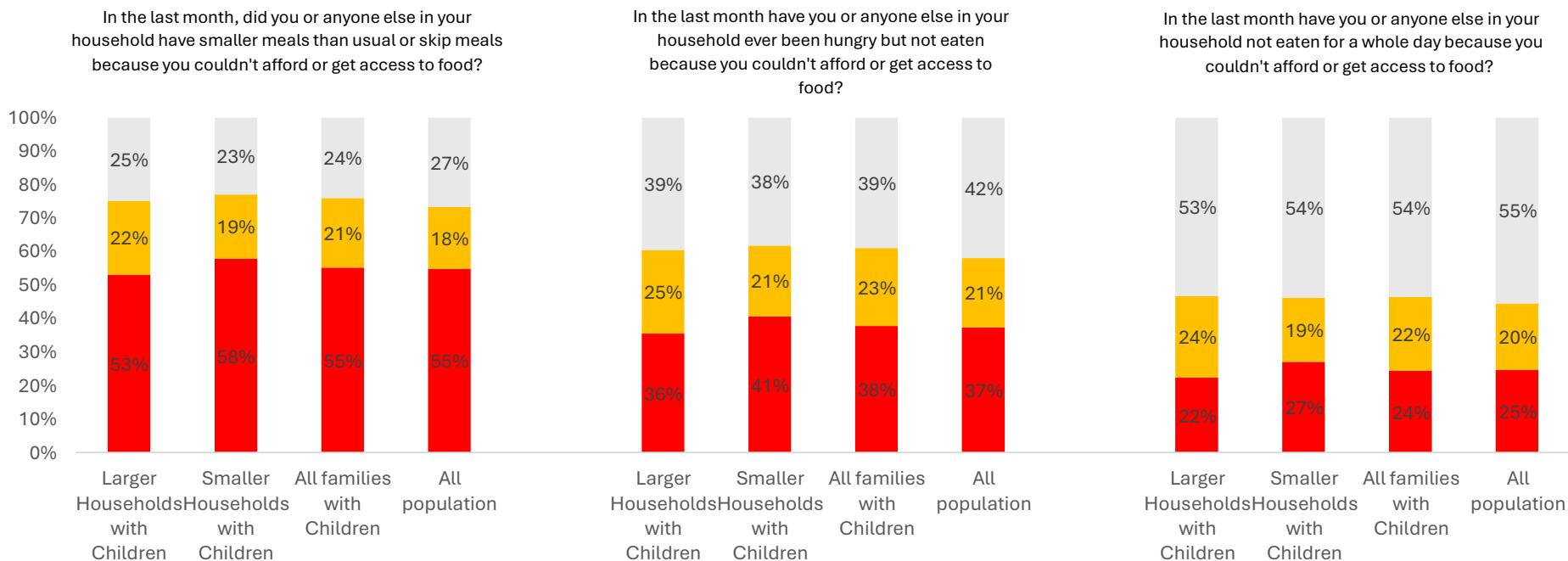
These pressures are being felt across areas where the recent high price inflation has had the biggest bite – food, utilities, rent and Council tax being particularly high areas of concern. These pressures mean residents are turning to more desperate means of coping.

***“I’ve had to borrow money from friends and family to cover rent and grocery shopping. I’ve also had to sell personal goods to help with living costs. I am paying them back in instalments each month – it is a big struggle.”*** – Survey Respondent

Larger Households - Households of 4 or more people  
Smaller Households - Households of less than 4 people

## Survey Responses about Food and Eating

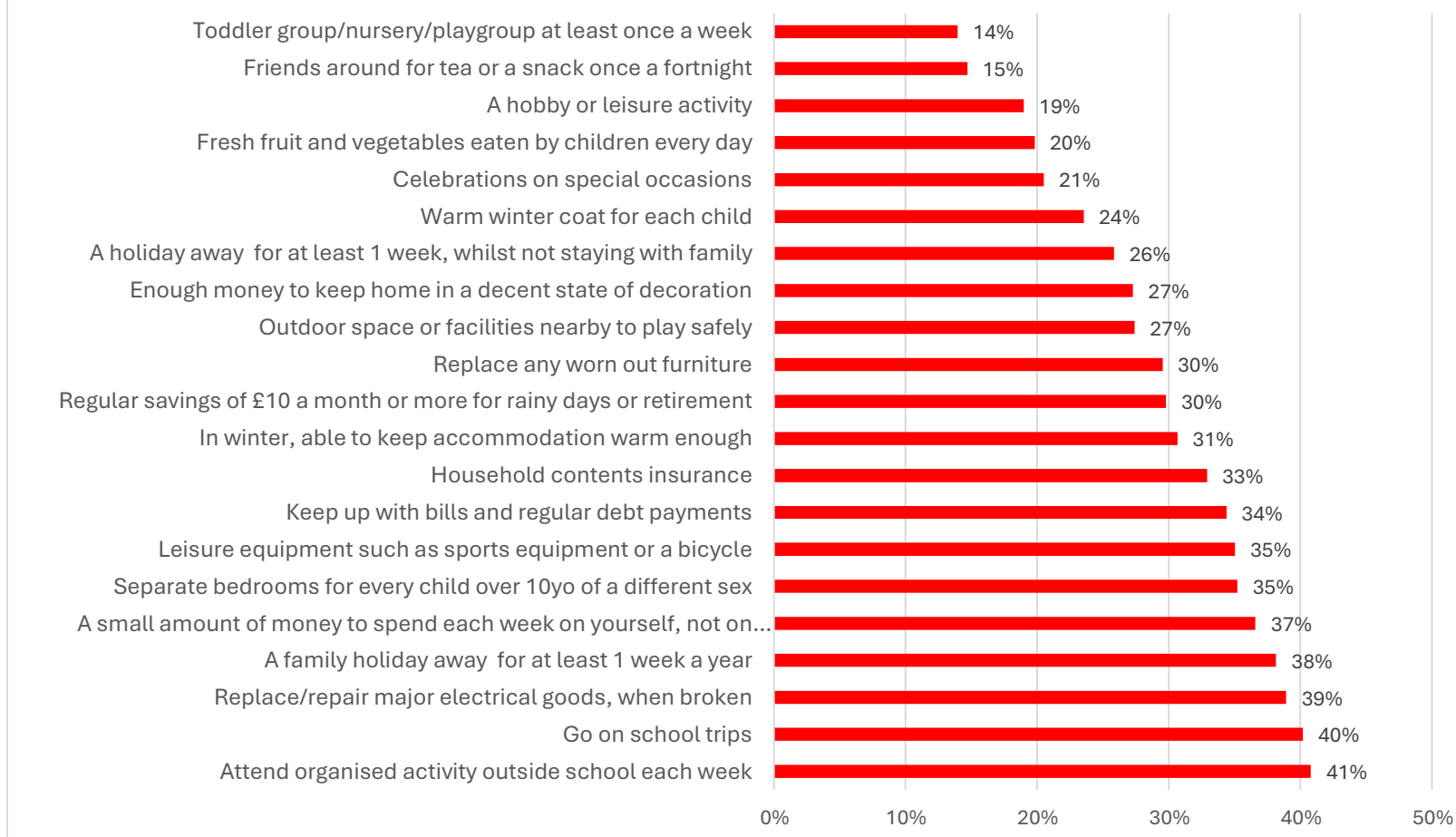
Yes Prefer Not to Say No



Perhaps the starkest evidence of the impact of poverty in Barking and Dagenham is reflected in the survey responses around food insecurity. According to the data, 25% of all respondents said they or someone in their household had not eaten for a whole day in the past month due to the cost or lack of access to food, with a further 20% preferring not to say. Notably, smaller households with children - which are more likely to be single-parent families - reported greater levels of food insecurity across all three survey questions, with 41% stating they had been hungry but not eaten and 27% reporting they had gone a whole day without food. This highlights the disproportionate impact of rising living costs on smaller family households. The knock-on effects of this - on health, attainment, and overall wellbeing - are inarguable.



### Percentage of Families with Children unable to access:



We are a young and vibrant borough – but again we can see from the survey responses the impact that high costs and a lack of income has on our young people. The questions above, based on the government child material deprivation questions – show that families in Barking and Dagenham are often going without things that many other families have access to – such as being able to replace broken home appliances, go away on holiday, keep up with bills or attend organised activities outside of school.

## Conversations

Resident engagement is an important tool for ensuring that any interventions aimed at reducing poverty are grounded in lived experience, and responsive to the needs of those who experience poverty firsthand. By centring our residents' experiences and actively involving them in the design and delivery, we aim to ensure the relevance and impact of proposed interventions, gather feedback to refine them, and tackle any additional challenges that might otherwise go unnoticed. Through engaging with residents, we also hope to map out systemic barriers that perpetuate poverty, enabling this strategy to be more holistic and sustainable in its long-term approach to tackling the root causes of poverty.

## Research methodology

Although the engagement is still in its early stages; initial insights have been valuable. Resident engagement will continue as the interventions are further developed and begin to be delivered. To ensure inclusivity and accessibility, we are using a mix of research methods:

- Targeted surveys to gather quantitative data on specific barriers that residents face.
- 1-1 interviews to understand these barriers in depth and identify opportunities for support.
- Workshops to co-design solutions with residents.

Work has taken place with frontline services to recruit residents that are accessing our support services and have also issued open calls to participate. Participants receive financial compensation for their time and involvement.

An important foundation for our research was engaging with residents to understand their aspirations for a better life, so that our analysis and intervention design are guided by a shared vision of what that better life could look like. Additionally, we have adopted three lenses to identify recurring challenges, needs and opportunities for these aspirations:

- **Current and actionable challenges:** These are immediate barriers that residents are facing, which directly inform the design and execution of the interventions and pilots outlined in this strategy.
- **Long-term challenges:** These are challenges that arise from persistent and long-term issues that require sustained attention, such as mental and physical health challenges. These would shape the direction of any future work and partnerships.
- **Systemic challenges:** These refer to structural issues, such as domestic violence, cultural taboo etc. that would require long-term cross-sector collaboration. Work on these would extend beyond the scope and timeline of this strategy.

## Emerging Themes

Early interview responses have reiterated that every resident's situation is nuanced and unique. Although a full analysis will be required to understand repeating patterns and challenges, initial insights offer valuable indications of the kind of support residents may need:

- Residents dealing with severe physical and mental health challenges often experience low confidence and heightened anxiety, which can make it difficult for them to navigate services and take action, even when support is available. Relational support is essential to help them move from knowing what to do to feeling empowered to do it.

*"Everyone is telling me I did wrong, that I should've just accepted the house...but I was so worried about disappointing the landlady. But it's hard because you know, I overthink a lot...I was on a lot of meds and not stable, so she withdrew the offer."*

- People with caring responsibilities such as looking after a young child or a family member, find it challenging to balance education, training, or employment alongside their caregiving duties, which can result in prioritising care full time and being economically inactive.

*"I was about to sit my exams but gave birth two months before... now it's been 18 months and my situation has changed, I don't feel like I'm able to re-sit them anytime soon."*

*"I have to look after my mum, my kids, my husband... I need a job that helps me balance family life."*

- Barriers to claiming child maintenance are layered, ranging from low motivation and emotional fatigue to deeper issues of trauma and fear. For many, the emotional effort outweighs the perceived reward, especially when contact with an ex-partner brings in psychological or physical risk.

*"I have a private arrangement with my ex but even if I could get more through CMS (which I know I would) and they would handle everything, I wouldn't do it... Even if they were to handle it, my ex would know what I was doing so it would just blow it out of proportion."*

## Next Steps

We are committed to carrying out our plans for resident engagement as a continuous and evolving process. This includes both understanding in more depth the context, barriers and attitudes that our residents experience, and also more directly involving them in the design and iteration of interventions.

## Help available now

The evidence is stark – and that’s why we need to act to improve how we tackle poverty in Barking and Dagenham. While the focus of the interventions included in this document are focused on specific barriers facing the most vulnerable, there is a wide range of support that is currently available to anyone in the borough.



### **Community Hubs and Community Navigators**

Universal offer at hubs providing internet access, IAG and wraparound support for a range of low level and high level needs.



### **B&D Money**

Website to support residents with the Cost of Living and day to day money help - including welfare benefits and grant information



### **Community Food Club**

Membership for free groceries and wraparound support



### **Healthy Start**

If eligible, provide families with children under 4 (or more than 10 weeks pregnant) money every month to purchase milk, fruit, veg and pulses.



### **Credit Union Partnership**

Offers a range of affordable financial services through Leeds Credit Union, including savings accounts, affordable loans up to £25,000, and budgeting advice



### **B&D Opportunities (B&D Works, B&D Learns, B&D Business)**

Provide access to training, employment support, vacancies and business support to encourage enterprise and local employment



### **Housing and Homelessness Prevention**

Support residents and vulnerable residents with sustaining tenancies, finding accommodation and homelessness support



### **Early Help and Family Hubs**

Children's groups and activities and support for children, young people and their families where they have additional needs that aren't being met by the usual services



## Our Approach

There are many ways to approach tackling poverty. Resources across sectors are stretched – and we are currently unable to provide the same level of support for everyone. In the immediate term, we will take an approach that considers the concept of **proportionate universalism**. In other words, while there will be some form of support available for anyone who needs it, we must flex and focus our attention on where there is the greatest need and opportunity to have the greatest impact. **As such, the approach we are taking this year is to develop a test-and-learn approach to address barriers for specific cohorts.**

Time is not on our side – as stated previously, there are severe and pressing issues that are impeding the lives of some residents in Barking and Dagenham, and further challenges are coming. While we have worked to gather insights through qualitative and quantitative research, action is required now. We will engage in a programme of interventions, stood up to quickly test assumptions, trial new ways to support individuals and learn from them. Further resident engagement will form a crucial part of the learning process, and inform the design of future projects.

Our approach can be broadly described as follows:

- **Desk and quantitative research:** We started with desk-based research, looking at national data to understand drivers of poverty and identify a long list of cohorts that are disproportionately affected (*for example, lone parents*). We

compared that to local data to establish the situation in Barking and Dagenham and further narrow down the cohorts. By looking at research published by independent research organisations, we developed hypotheses about why certain vulnerable cohorts are pushed into poverty and/or stay in poverty. These hypotheses were the basis of subsequent conversations with services.

- **Service engagement:** We consulted with service area experts to understand in detail the opportunities and risks for each cohort, test our initial hypotheses, and understand current initiatives happening in the council, to align future interventions.
- **Co-design workshops:** We brought together quantitative and qualitative data to understand recurring themes across cohorts and define the specific barriers faced by them (*for example, childcare costs, benefit cap, and low-paid work*). This formed the basis of workshops we conducted with a wide range of stakeholders to look at the specific barriers and define areas of intervention.
- **Theories of change:** In order to have a test and learn approach, it was important that we developed theories of change that outlined the interventions, assumptions, outcome measures and wider impact we expect to see. This will underpin the evaluation, allowing us to measure impact and structure our learnings for future iterations.

# Equalities and Diversity Considerations

## Equalities

Poverty is not just a financial issue—it is a fundamental equalities issue that disproportionately affects certain communities, entrenching inequality across generations. Addressing poverty requires a targeted approach that considers the structural barriers faced by disadvantaged groups.

Poverty does not affect all communities equally. People are more likely to experience financial hardship due to systemic inequalities in employment, education, housing, and healthcare depending on their identities and characteristics – including women, people with disabilities, care leavers and other groups. These disparities are further compounded by unequal access to resources and opportunities, such as employment.

We will use Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) to ensure we consider the effect our interventions have on different groups based on their protected characteristics and that they do not reinforce existing inequalities and instead promote inclusive outcomes.

## Intersectionality

Intersectionality considers that people have overlapping experiences and identities. In other words, age, sex, gender identity, disability, race, sexual orientation and other individual characteristics do not exist in isolation. Any one individual can

face a variety of barriers and discrimination unique to their own backgrounds and lived experience.

Poverty also features interplay of systemic and individual factors. Various drivers of poverty combine and overlap in complex and cumulative ways to affect the lived experiences of individuals or groups of people experiencing hardship. This kind of intersectionality is a vital lens to adopt when addressing poverty, as poverty is not experienced equally, and different factors shape people's experiences and access to support.

A great deal of further work is required to understand in depth the specific intersectional challenges our residents face. For example, understanding not just the barriers of being a woman or being disabled, but the unique discrimination experienced as a disabled woman.

As part of our work moving forward, we want to create the space and focus to consider these questions and design interventions from a more informed perspective. In the short-term, we are choosing to focus our interventions on common barriers identified – for example access to flexible working or childcare availability – in the hope that finding ways to address these issues will have a positive impact for people with a variety of characteristics.

## Resident groups we are focusing on

The impacts of poverty disproportionately impact certain groups in Barking and Dagenham. Analysing the data and speaking to a variety of services has indicated that we needed to explore the barriers facing the groups outlined below.

### Lone Parents

There are 3.2 million lone parent families in the UK, with over 40% of children in lone parent families living in poverty.<sup>16 17</sup> 12.8% of all families in Barking and Dagenham are headed by a lone parent with dependent children – the highest proportion in England and Wales.<sup>18</sup>

Research indicates that increasing the number of earners in the household is one of the biggest factors lifting people out of poverty.<sup>19</sup> However, this strategy is largely inaccessible to lone-parent families with dependent children, placing them at a distinct disadvantage. In addition, challenges such as limited access to affordable and reliable childcare continue to hinder them from entering or remaining in the workforce.<sup>20</sup> Nearly a third of lone parents are not in work due to caring responsibilities, and although the government allows parents on Universal Credit to claim up to 85% of childcare costs, it is paid in arrears, meaning that parents without ready cash still cannot afford it.<sup>21</sup> To balance working and caregiving, many take up part time work and are far more likely to be on low earnings.<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, although receiving child maintenance cuts child poverty rates by 25%, insights from the Barking and Dagenham welfare service suggests that a vast majority of lone parents don't claim child maintenance.

### Large Families (3+ children)

There are estimated to be around 1.18 million large families in the UK, with 46% of children in these families living in poverty.<sup>23 24</sup> There are over 17,000+ families with 2 or more children in Barking and Dagenham, many of whom are particularly vulnerable to multiple forms of deprivation.<sup>25</sup>

As with lone parents, caring responsibilities are a major barrier to employment, contributing significantly to income deprivation. For families with three or more children, childcare costs can be very high, making it difficult for parents to work more hours and still have money left after paying for childcare.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, policies such as the benefit cap and two-child limit have a disproportionate impact on large families - driving poverty by restricting eligibility and limiting the total income a household can receive.<sup>27</sup> If parents are unable to find appropriate, affordable childcare (as is often the case), one parent may be forced to leave work to care for the children, leaving the family to rely on a single income.

In large families, there is also a higher likelihood that one child will have additional needs, which further increases their caring responsibilities. Balancing caring arrangements for multiple children means that good quality, flexible work is critical for enabling parents to be in long term employment.

## Families with young children (aged 0-5)

In the UK, poverty affects more than a third (36%) of children living in families with at least one child under the age of 5, amounting to roughly 1.3 million babies and young children.<sup>28</sup> Barking and Dagenham has the highest proportion of under 5s in the UK and rates of child poverty are also amongst the highest in London at 42%.<sup>29</sup>

Food poverty, specifically, is a significant challenge faced by this cohort, with 17% of households with children under 4 experiencing food insecurity. Poor nutrition during the early years of life can significantly impact a child's long-term health outcomes, making it a critical factor in giving children the best start in life.

Food poverty is directly linked to income poverty. As the cost-of-living crisis continues to disproportionately impact low-income households in the borough, a growing number of families are struggling to access sufficient and nutritious food. 56% of residents in Barking and Dagenham have reported skipping meals due to unaffordability or inaccessibility of food.<sup>30</sup>

Government initiatives like 'Healthy Start' have also failed to keep pace with inflation, so its real value has diminished, having not increased since before the cost-of-living crisis (2021). Restrictive eligibility criteria, lack of awareness, a laborious application process and some technicalities also mean that many children in poverty are missing out on schemes like Healthy Start and Free Early Years Meals, which are critical safety nets for families with low incomes to support and feed their children a nutritious diet.<sup>31</sup>

## People with disabilities/long term ill-health

Under the Equality Act 2010, a disabled person is described as someone with a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities. More than half of all people in poverty in the UK live in a family that includes a disabled person.<sup>32</sup> 31% of those in poverty are themselves disabled, and 38% have a long term, limiting mental health condition.<sup>33</sup> In Barking and Dagenham, around 20% of the population is living with a disability, and the borough is supporting approximately 8,500 children and young people with SEND.<sup>34 35</sup>

Higher poverty rates for disabled people are partly due to the additional costs associated with disability and ill health and partly due to the barriers to work they face.<sup>36</sup> On average, households with at least one disabled adult or child need an additional £1,067 per month to have the same standard of living as non-disabled households.<sup>37</sup> Current benefits do not cover all disability-related costs, and proving the need for disability benefits – especially for mental health conditions – remains challenging.

Disabled people also face difficulties accessing equitable, well-paid jobs. They are almost twice as likely to be unemployed and three times as likely to be economically inactive when compared to non-disabled people. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health conditions have surged, especially amongst the most deprived, contributing to the rise in economically inactive, long-term sick cohort.<sup>38</sup> People with poor mental health are also more likely to have problem debt, adding to their financial burden.<sup>39</sup>



## Care Leavers

In England, over 80,000 children are in care, with around 13,000 leaving care each year.<sup>40</sup> In Barking & Dagenham, the rate of looked after children is 68 per 10,000 children aged under 18.<sup>41</sup>

Most children enter care due to abuse, neglect or family dysfunction, and many care leavers face poor physical and mental health. These adverse backgrounds add an extra layer of vulnerability, exacerbating their lived experiences when they become older and resulting in poorer outcomes.<sup>42</sup>

By age 25, many care leavers lose housing support and benefits, and with 57% reporting difficulty managing finances, rent and bills after leaving care.<sup>43</sup> Prior to leaving care, care leavers often lack necessary education and support with budgeting and practical life skills. As of 2025 in Barking and Dagenham, 37% of care leavers are not in education, employment or training, and 79 care leavers are currently in paid-for accommodation, meaning that after they turn 21 years old, they will need to move into their own accommodation/housing.

Given these challenges, it is crucial to recognize care leavers as a vulnerable cohort when addressing poverty, as they require targeted support to transition successfully into adulthood.

## Young People with Mental ill-health and are NEET

The current youth employment rate for 16–24-year-olds not in full-time employment or education (NEET) in the UK is 14.2%, with this cohort being 2.5 times more vulnerable to poverty than those who are in employment.<sup>44</sup> Mental health issues – especially depression, anxiety and stress – are increasingly cited as reasons for economic inactivity within this cohort.

Barking & Dagenham has one of the highest rates of youth (18-24 years old) unemployment in London (15%).<sup>45</sup> Many young people who are NEET are also care-experienced and have faced adverse childhood experiences, or face challenges like intergenerational worklessness, sickness/disability or caring responsibilities, often leading to involuntary exclusion from the labour market. Young people in Barking and Dagenham also face challenges due to low pay and insecure work in the borough. An estimated 24.6% of residents earn below the Living Wage,<sup>46</sup> and low job density and a lack of good quality, flexible jobs exacerbate this issue.

Targeted support for this group can improve mental health, employment outcomes and economic resilience, benefitting both individuals and the wider community.

## Initial areas of focus

The below areas of focus are our initial starting point – areas where we believe, following a series of workshops and conversations, there is room to improve support for those vulnerable cohorts that have been discussed previously. This is just the start – over the next year, we plan to further identify opportunities and implement test-and-learn interventions to establish new ways to improve financial security in Barking and Dagenham.

### 1. Increasing Child Maintenance take up

#### Gap

Receiving child maintenance from the non-resident parent has been found to cut child poverty by 25% in single-parent households. A national survey by Gingerbread of 1622 single parents found that of those not receiving child maintenance, roughly 50% are struggling to pay essential bills, food, clothes, school uniforms for their children, etc. and 57% are getting into debt.<sup>47</sup> Barking and Dagenham Debt and Welfare services have found that a lot of single parents don't seem to be claiming child maintenance often due to a lack of awareness about the process, concerns about disclosing income, or fear of losing out on other benefits. A particularly significant barrier to wanting to claim child maintenance for many, highlighted through conversations with single mothers, is the fear of an ex-partner and the potential psychological or physical risks involved.

While increasing the take-up of Child Maintenance is a crucial step in addressing financial hardship among single-parent families, it is important that this initiative does not rely solely on a deficit-based approach focused on recovering unpaid funds. Instead, it should be embedded within a broader framework that promotes positive parenting and constructive co-parenting relationships. This means actively engaging fathers—not just as financial contributors, but as emotionally present and responsible parents. There are services that are delivered to support this. Family Hubs, for example, offer a valuable opportunity to support fathers through tailored services, parenting programmes, and peer networks that encourage involvement and accountability.

## **Existing support**

<b>Child Maintenance Service (CMS)</b>	Child maintenance covers how a child's living costs will be paid when one of the parents does not live with the child. It's made when you've separated from the other parent or if you've never been in a relationship. The Child Maintenance Service can: <u>work out an amount to pay</u> , <u>arrange payments</u> and take action if a parent does not pay, sort out <u>disagreements about parentage</u> , try to find the other parent if you do not know where they are.
<b>Citizens Advice Barking and Dagenham</b>	Barking and Dagenham's leading advice agency – helping over 7,000 local residents each year on advice and casework. <a href="#">Citizen's Advice Barking &amp; Dagenham</a>
<b>Local debt and welfare advice services</b>	There are several local organisations working to support residents through income and benefit maximisation, and also signpost single parents to CMS. This includes organisations such as Debt Free Advice, DABD and the Council's debt and welfare services.
<b>B&amp;D Money</b>	Website to support residents with the Cost of Living and day to day money help – including information on issues such as welfare benefits and grants.

## **Aim**

**Maximise the income of single parents by encouraging them to claim child maintenance.**

*“How might we increase the number of single parents receiving child maintenance, especially looking at those that are on low income and reluctant to use CMS, are not aware of what they are entitled to, or are misinformed about what the process entails?”*

### **Intervention**

Borough-wide communications campaign that includes behavioural nudges to promote child maintenance and encourage single parents to take it up:

1. Online self-assessment to check eligibility for child maintenance and target support.
2. Clear information and guidance about claiming child maintenance safely when there is risk of domestic abuse and increase trust in the CMS.
3. Information dissemination through multiple touchpoints such as Family Hubs, Health Visitors, Social Workers.
4. Potential referral into Early Help, Refuge, and other safeguarding to provide wrap around support to single parents.

### **Expected outcomes**

- Improve awareness of child maintenance.
- Increase the number of single parents claiming child maintenance.
- Increase the support that single parents receive from our support services such as Early Help.
- Increase in £ income for households that were provided financial incentive to claim child maintenance.

### **Assumptions**

- We think that the key factors in driving behaviour here are opportunity and motivation. Therefore, a multi-channel comms campaign focused on awareness will be a potential lever of change.
- People will volunteer to disclose engagement with CMS and whether they are now receiving child maintenance (through CMS or a private arrangement) through a survey.



## 2. Supporting those affected by the benefit cap who could claim disability benefit

### Gap

Barking and Dagenham has a high prevalence of disability and special educational needs, with 20% of residents living with a disability and over 8,500 children and young people identified with SEND. A previous pilot done by the Welfare Service in conjunction with commissioned support on delivery from DABD funded via the Household Support Fund to support households that were benefit capped showed that helping families with a child with SEND to claim disability benefits had major impact in lifting the benefit cap and maximising income. Given this, it's likely that more families remain capped despite being potentially eligible for exemptions through benefits like PIP, DLA, or Carer's Allowance. Barriers such as complex eligibility rules, especially for mental health, and low awareness prevent access. Disabled households face significantly higher living costs, averaging £1,067 more per month, and are disproportionately affected by poverty, unemployment, and problem debt. Without proactive outreach and tailored support, families with disabled children risk remaining trapped under the benefit cap, unable to access the financial relief they urgently need.

In 2023, 1,712 Council Tax Support (CTS) cases were affected by a Benefit Cap deduction in their Universal Credit award, representing 24% of the working-age CTS caseload, with an average monthly deduction of £305. These figures only reflect cases identified through CTS, so the actual number of residents impacted was likely higher. While this data is from 2023, it offers a useful benchmark for understanding the scale of financial pressure.

### Existing support

<b>Local debt and welfare advice services</b>	There are several local organisations working to support residents through income and benefit maximisation, and also signpost single parents to CMS. This includes organisations such as Debt Free Advice, DABD and the Council's debt and welfare services.
<b>B&amp;D Money</b>	Website to support residents with the Cost of Living and day to day money help – including information on issues such welfare benefits and grants.

## **Aim**

**Supporting households that are benefit capped and have a disability in the household to maximise their income.**

*“How can we identify benefit-capped households that include a person with a disability - particularly children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) - in order to proactively support them in claiming disability-related benefits, and thereby lift the benefit cap?”*

## **Intervention**

A proactive outreach initiative to support people claim disability related benefits:

1. Use council-held data to identify households that are benefit capped and have a child with SEND (live Council Tax Support)
2. Work with partners (DABD commissioned and funded via Household Support Fund) to proactively contact these households and offer support with claiming disability related benefits, if eligible

This intervention will be delivered as a pilot in partnership with one of our delivery partners and will be evaluated upon completion to assess its impact and effectiveness.

## **Expected outcomes**

- Lift the benefit cap and maximise income through disability related benefits
- Increase in £ income for households that were eligible for support
- Improved mental health and wellbeing due to the financial support provided

## **Assumptions**

- We assume that there is a cohort of households that fit these criteria and will benefit from proactive support. Data matching exercises will help us understand and define the actual number of households.
- This intervention depends on the availability of relevant data sets to identify eligible households.

### 3. Improving access to food that is affordable and healthy

#### Gap

Food insecurity is a consistent challenge in Barking and Dagenham. 25% of residents who have answered our survey have gone at least one day without eating – far above the figures nationally. Particular cohorts are especially vulnerable – both because of the likelihood of them struggling to feed themselves sufficiently, and because of the additional impacts of malnutrition. This includes families with single parents, larger families and younger children, who are at higher risk. In turn, there are long term impacts on factors such as health and attainment.<sup>48</sup>

Emergency food access is a vital lifeline for those most vulnerable. However, it is essential that any support that these residents' access doesn't stop there, and where appropriate, individuals are supported towards a place where they can access longer-term support in their community.

#### Existing support

<b>Good Food Action Plan</b>	The Good Food Action Plan is a framework developed by Barking and Dagenham's Food Partnership, outlining how the borough can work together for a better food environment, that supports residents to access sustainable, nourishing and culturally diverse food – and reduces our environmental impact.
<b>Community Food Clubs</b>	Provide membership for free groceries and holistic wraparound support to improve resident's situation.
<b>Food Banks</b>	Provide emergency food packages to residents in need of immediate support: <a href="https://www.lbdd.gov.uk/money-and-debt/foodbanks">https://www.lbdd.gov.uk/money-and-debt/foodbanks</a>
<b>Healthy Start Vouchers</b>	NHS Healthy Start is a long-running, national scheme to help low-income families with young children buy healthy food and milk. As it is now provided through a pre-paid, contactless card, it is easier for families to spend their Healthy Start entitlement. In Barking and Dagenham, activity is taking place focused on promoting Healthy Start across the system and providing practical support for eligible families to apply at our Family Hubs. This scheme will increase in value from April 2026

<b>Food Education Programme</b>	The Food Education Programme and Good Food Charter promote inclusive, healthy and inspiring curricula and food culture in all schools in Barking and Dagenham through sustained partnership with key industry partners, teachers, educational professionals to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to support their health and nutrition and understand the wealth of careers in food, catering, and hospitality industries. Further information can be found here: <a href="https://bdopportunities.org/bd-does-business/food/schools-and-parents-food/">https://bdopportunities.org/bd-does-business/food/schools-and-parents-food/</a>
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## **Aim**

**Improve wraparound support provided alongside emergency food provision – particularly access to financial inclusion and connection to other services available – in order to prevent and mitigate poverty.**

**Enhance the range of food support available further up the food ladders – including extending support beyond crisis relief and facilitating self-organised community activities.**

“How can we improve access to emergency food provision, while capitalising on the opportunity to work with residents in need to address underlying issues and improve connection and confidence.”

## **Intervention**

A programme of development work – based on the “food ladders”<sup>49</sup> framework - aiming to:

- Co-design an action plan with food providers and work alongside local distribution networks to provide a broad range of holistic support.
- Explore broader ways to enhance food security – including building on the recent success of cooking clubs.
- Improve availability of food specific training programmes – with the aim of giving residents the skills to self-organise – leading to opportunities for individual income generation.

**Expected outcomes**

- Increased financial inclusion support provided in emergency food settings.
- Increased self-reported confidence around food/reported lower food insecurity.
- Numbers of residents completing accredited and non-accredited training supporting employment or self-employment in the food industry.
- Numbers of self-organised food projects led by residents.

**Assumptions**

External Funding is available to support provision of activities and evaluation.

## 4. Improving access to flexible work

### Gap

23.8% of Barking and Dagenham residents’ jobs are low paid (much higher than the London average of 17.5%) while the unemployment rate is 7.3% (again, higher than the London average of 5.1%).<sup>50</sup> Getting into work, and finding a role that pays sufficiently, are significant challenges for our residents. A key barrier is the lack of good quality, flexible work options – which are essential for groups such as lone parents, families with multiple or high needs children, people with disabilities, and carers. Without flexibility, many are unable to enter or remain in the workforce. For example, those with children may find it difficult to manage the related cost and time-management to access childcare – while in recent research 70% of disabled workers said that if their employer did not allow them to work remotely, it would negatively impact their physical or mental health.<sup>51</sup>

Nationally, fewer than 1 in 3 job adverts offer some form of flexible working.<sup>52</sup> Increasing the number of employers offering flexible work opportunities is key to increasing good employment.

### Existing support

<b>B&amp;D Opportunities (B&amp;D Works, B&amp;D Learns, B&amp;D Business)</b>	Provide access to training, employment support, vacancies (including construction), business support and a Local Supported Employment programme to help adults to move into and stay in work.
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### Aim

**Increase the number of people getting into employment through the provision of flexible work opportunities.**

*“How might we encourage local employers to offer more flexible jobs in general, as well as support specific, individual placements into flexible work”.*

## **Intervention**

Multi-faceted, targeted work to increase flexible working in Barking and Dagenham through employer engagement.

1. Direct employer engagement to share understanding of how jobs can be designed flexibly (with place based, time based and/or reduced hours flexibility), as well as how to use job carving to shape roles to be suitable for someone with specific barriers to work, such as a learning disability or Autism Spectrum Disorder. Particular attention will be given to sectors facing retention challenges – such as health and social care providers. This can be explored in tandem with B&D Business which works with local businesses and entrepreneurs to encourage enterprise and local employment.
2. Targeted work with employers to provide support for a small number of individuals who would benefit from flexible work placements (for example carers who need to work under a fixed number of hours a week). This may include encouraging trial placements or incentivising hiring to flexible posts.

## **Expected outcomes**

- Increased numbers of employers offering work adjustments
- Increased flexible placements for individuals identified by the brokerage service.
- Increased number of residents sustaining employment due to flexible working adjustments.

## **Assumptions**

- Direct support to employers to create flexible roles for individual placements will require resource (if for example it involves direct incentivisation)
- Availability of training for staff (including the B&D Works team) in order to deliver high quality employer engagement on flexible work.

## 5. Addressing material barriers to employment

### Gap

Barking and Dagenham has high levels of unemployment and low pay – despite being less than 30 minutes from central London. There are a variety of job opportunities available both in and out of the borough for our residents – but material barriers to employment exist and hinder the ability for some individuals to access these opportunities. 51% of clients to B&D Works last year cited the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on their current circumstances. These include areas such as travel costs, access to clothing, food insecurity, hygiene products and more. In 2025, a study commissioned by the Hygiene Bank charity has found that 10% of adults have even avoided job interviews as they felt they were not clean or presentable enough. This is also an area where particular groups are more impacted than others – for example parents who need to juggle school runs alongside commuting, or disabled people, 1 in 4 of whom who are unemployed say inaccessible transport is why they have no job.<sup>53</sup>

### Existing support

<b>Department of Work and Pensions support</b>	Work coaches can help with a variety of costs for jobseekers – including access to the jobcentre plus travel discount: <a href="#">Jobcentre Plus Travel Discount - Transport for London</a> . The flexible support fund can help with travel expenses to attend an interview and clothing/uniform to start work. This is a discretionary fund, and requires an application from the job seeker.
<b>Disabled Persons Railcard</b>	Provides 1/3 off national rail travel for a person and an adult companion if they meet eligibility criteria. <a href="#">Disabled Persons Railcard   National Rail</a>
<b>Access to work</b>	<p>Access to Work can help you get or stay in work if you have a physical or mental health condition or disability.</p> <p>The support you get will depend on your needs. Through Access to Work, you can apply for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a grant to help pay for practical support with your work</li><li>• support with managing your mental health at work</li><li>• money to pay for communication support at job interviews</li></ul> <p>It should be noted that this service is in high demand, and that there are currently delays nationally of approximately 6-9months.</p>



## **Aim**

**Increase the number of job starts by helping bridge material gaps that currently prevent people from taking the first step into employment (or better, more suitable employment) without the need for delays related to filling in applications or waiting for a response.**

*“How might we give our job brokers the tools to make sure that they can respond to the specific barriers an individual faces when attempting to embark on new employment – including travel costs, clothing or hygiene products – there and then, without requiring the person seeking work to take significant time to access this support”.*

## **Intervention**

A discretionary pot has been established (through the Household Support Fund) that job brokers can draw down in order to support Barking and Dagenham residents with any material barriers to securing employment. This support will be available to anyone engaging with B&D Works who is due to attend an interview or start employment and is affected by the cost-of-living crisis. This would enable an offer of support with areas such as (but not limited to) interview and work clothing, hygiene packs and travel costs – aiming to make a difference to their confidence and ability to succeed in their interview or the early days of starting work. Brokers who are working directly with residents will be given the autonomy to provide vouchers for clothing and travel or other material barriers instantly as it is often identified the support is needed at short notice.

This intervention will be delivered as a pilot to support up to 100 clients, with the trial concluding once the target number of participants has been reached. Evaluation will compare outcomes to a historical control group to assess impact and inform future funding and scaling decisions.

### **Expected outcomes**

- Increased number of B&D Works clients securing employment.
- Increased number of B&D Works clients sustaining employment.
- Reduced time between registering with B&D Works to securing employment.
- Other secondary measures such as improved attendance at interviews and improved confidence levels (measured qualitatively).

In order to explore the feasibility to scale up, we will also be looking to understand:

- Demand for this support
- Average cost of supporting clients with material barriers
- Cost broken down by needs

### **Assumptions**

- Success of this project will rely on the assumption that these material barriers are key physical and psychological barriers to starting work – this will be tested through this project.
- That barriers exist to other support available – mainly onerous application processes and associated delays.

## 6. Supporting parents into employment through support with childcare

### Gaps

Nearly a third of lone parents are not in work due to caring responsibilities, with childcare costs - especially for parents with three or more children - being prohibitively high. For low-income families, the cost of childcare is a major barrier to employment. Many parents who do work opt for part-time roles to better balance childcare and job demands, such as caring responsibilities over the 30 hours of free childcare and school pickups and drops. Our services also pointed out that costs related to travel can impact their ability to get to work and take children to school, causing school absences. The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment recognises that none of the childcare providers are at capacity, meaning there is sufficient provision as per the demand. However, more needs to be done to actively promote the childcare offer so that as many families as possible can take it up.<sup>54</sup>

### Existing support

<b>85% off childcare costs for UC claimants</b>	You may be able to claim back up to 85% of your childcare costs if you're eligible for Universal Credit (but need to pay the remaining up front). You (and your partner if you live with them) will usually need to either: be working (it does not matter how many hours you or your partner work) or: have a job offer. The most you can get back each month is: £1,031.88 for one child, £1,768.94 for 2 or more children.
<b>Free childcare (for all)</b>	Up to 30 hours (9months to 4yrs) - To be eligible for free childcare, you (and your partner, if you have one) need to be in work or about to start a new job and earn over a certain amount. You'll need a National Insurance number to apply.  Up to 15 hours free (3yr - 4yrs) - all families
<b>Tax Free Childcare</b>	Tax Free Childcare is a government scheme helping working families with their childcare costs in an affordable way. For every £8 a parent pays in, the government will pay in an extra £2. Parents can receive up to £2,000 per child, per year, towards their childcare costs, or £4,000 for disabled children. If you're a working parent with children under 12 (or under 17 for disabled children), you can open an online account to pay for registered childcare.
<b>0 to 19 Health Visiting Service</b>	Comprehensive program focused on providing health and developmental support to children and families from pregnancy through to age 19 to ensure the best start to life. It integrates health visiting and school nursing services, encompassing the Healthy Child Programme.

## **Aim**

***Enable parents to take up secure employment by supporting them overcome barriers relating to childcare costs.***

*“How might we support parents to take up employment opportunities through additional childcare provisions?”*

## **Intervention**

A new scheme delivered by the Council’s employment support service – B&D Works – to support parents into employment where childcare is the only barrier to take up or sustain work - 15% additional childcare costs to be paid through Trailblazer funding, supplementing the support towards 85% of costs available through the Department for Work and Pensions.

## **Expected outcomes**

- Increase in parents' capacity to seek employment opportunities.
- Increase in number of parents in secure employment.
- Improvement in school attendance and at breakfast clubs/after school clubs.
- Increase in household income due to employment.

## **Assumptions**

- For some parents, additional support with childcare costs can be a key enabler for entering the workforce. The scheme relies on accurate identification of childcare as a key barrier to employment by the job broker.

## 7. Cost of essentials for parents with young children

### Gap

Low-income families with young children often struggle to afford the essential items needed to safely care for their babies. This includes basics such as clothing, blankets, nappies, and a safe space for sleep. These financial pressures are particularly acute in the first 1,000 days of a child's life, a critical period for healthy development. In Barking and Dagenham, the infant mortality rate is higher than the London average, underlining the importance of early intervention and support. While some support exists through community food clubs and baby banks, there is currently no structured, preventative offer providing essential baby items in a consistent, dignified, and non-stigmatising way.

### Existing support

<b>Early Help Team</b>	Supports families with young children and can help identify in need of additional support.
<b>Community Food Clubs</b>	Provide membership for free groceries and holistic wraparound support to improve resident's situation.
<b>Food Banks</b>	Provide emergency food packages to residents in need of immediate support
<b>The Source</b>	Provide hot meals, food bank, clothes and baby bank – based in Barking Learning Centre

### Aim

***Reduce the immediate risk of neglect and improve infant wellbeing by providing early, practical support to families during the first year of life, through an offer of essentials from birth – alongside connection to holistic support services.***

*“How might we reduce the financial pressure on families with young children by offering access to safe, essential baby care items during the first 1,000 days of life, while also strengthening engagement with wider services?”*

### Intervention

Launch of Barking and Dagenham Safe Sleep packs initiative to support families with new-born babies by providing essential items and promoting safe infant care.

- Provision of safe sleep baby boxes containing items such as a portable sleeping space, baby clothes, blankets, nappies, and accessories.
- Distribution through designated Family Hub, receiving offer of on-going support/advice/signposting across Barking and Dagenham services
- Delivery structured in three stages: at birth, at 3-6 months, and at 12 months to align with key development points.
- Integration of engagement and signposting to wraparound support services.

### **Expected outcomes**

- Reduced financial burden for low-income families by providing access to essentials.
- Reduced infant mortality rates.
- Improved parental confidence and infant safety through access to safe sleep items.
- Increased engagement with wider support services (via referral and follow-up processes) – including leading to further income maximisation or employability support.
- Fewer families using unsafe or inadequate alternatives (e.g. shared beds, reused or damaged cots).

### **Assumptions**

- Internal processes will be in place to enable delivery of the pilot, and referrers (e.g. Health Visitors, Midwives, Early Help practitioners) are well-placed to identify eligible families and facilitate access to the offer.
- Families will be willing to accept and use the items provided, particularly if offered in a supportive way.
- A staged delivery model (at 0, 3-6, and 12 months), alongside professional engagement, increases the likelihood of sustained engagement and relevance to family needs.
- The pilot will generate sufficient evidence on feasibility, outcomes, and cost-effectiveness to support future delivery and funding.

## 8. Holistic support for young people NEET and care leavers

### Gap

In Barking & Dagenham, youth unemployment among 18 - 24-year-olds stands at 15%, one of the highest rates in London. Many young people who are not in further education, employment or training (NEET) are also care-experienced or face additional barriers such as disability, caring responsibilities, or intergenerational worklessness. Mental health issues - especially depression, anxiety and stress - are increasingly cited as reasons for economic inactivity within the NEET cohort. In terms of care leavers specifically, many face poor physical and mental health due to adverse childhood experiences, compounding their vulnerability as they transition into adulthood. By the time they are 19-21 years old, 38% of care leavers in the UK are not in education, employment or training and are at high risk of homelessness. 57% of care leavers report finding it difficult to manage their money and avoid debt when leaving care. It has been identified by Barking and Dagenham Council services that care leavers have significant levels of rent arrears within temporary accommodation or secured Council tenancies, the wider social rent sector and within the private sector such as Reside. Vulnerable young people (including those who are NEET) and care leavers are known to be hard to reach cohorts and require holistic support that looks at their needs as a whole.

### Existing support

<b>B&amp;D Opportunities (BD Works, BD Learns, BD Business)</b>	Provide access to training, employment support, vacancies (including construction), business support and a Local Supported Employment programme to help adults with learning disabilities, autism, or both to move into and stay in work.
<b>Corporate Parenting Service</b>	Leaving Care support & Guidance for all aspects of life, also includes leaving care grants, loans and additional financial support.

### Aim

**Supporting young people not in employment, education or training and care leavers through holistic support that looks at employment, financial management and mental health as a whole.**

*“How might we provide targeted, early support for vulnerable young people such as NEETs and care leavers, to build resilience and prevent long-term unemployment”*

## **Intervention**

Holistic and targeted support for young people NEET and care leavers, provided by Beam who are commissioned to directly support specific vulnerable cohorts through the Household Support Fund.

- Young people NEET: Using technology and social media engagement to target young people aged 18-24 with a self-referral pathway into integrated support provided by Beam. The support includes employment, access to education and training, and therapy.
- Care leavers: Proactive identification of vulnerable care leavers in rent arrears and through internal housing and adult social care pathways as requiring further support. Beam will support care leavers by providing personalised financial management, education, access to therapy and tenancy sustainment support through an intensive, 1-2-1 support programme.

## **Expected outcomes**

Work with young people NEET:

- Reduced welfare and benefit costs
- Improved mental health and reduced healthcare costs
- Increased tax revenue
- Crime reduction
- Reduction in long-term social care dependency
- Reduced costs of homelessness

Work with care leavers:

- Reduced number of care leavers becoming homeless
- Improved mental health and reduced health care costs
- Reduction in long term social care dependency



### **Assumptions**

- This intervention is commissioned, and its success is dependent on the work delivered by Beam.

## 9. Improve transitions for Care Leavers

### Gap

Only 55% of care leavers aged 22 accessed support from their local authority in 2024, with engagement declining as they age.<sup>55</sup> Nationally, 57% of care leavers report difficulty in managing their money and avoiding debt when leaving care. Locally, in Barking and Dagenham, while in-house and commissioned resources exist to support care leavers in managing their finances, these resources are often not well-known or effectively utilised by them. A key issue is timing, as some of the structured support care leavers previously relied upon suddenly drops off, just as expectations and responsibilities (such as setting up bills or moving into their own accommodation) sharply increase. Without a gradual transition, they are more likely to experience financial instability, housing insecurity, and the development or worsening of mental health challenges.

Local data confirms this. Currently, there are 79 care leavers in paid-for accommodation, and Council services have identified that care leavers have significant levels of rent arrears within temporary accommodation or secured Council tenancies, the wider social rent sector and within the private sector such as Reside. 37% of care leavers within the borough are not in employment, education or training, and many report challenges with managing finances, and challenges with their mental health and/or learning disabilities. These factors all highlight the need for timely, visible and coordinated support for care leavers.

### Existing support

<b>Corporate Parenting Service</b>	Leaving Care support & Guidance for all aspects of life, also includes leaving care grants, loans and additional financial support. This supports continues till the care leaver is 21 and may extend till they are 25 (depending on the care leaver's individual circumstances).
<b>BEAM (this project is running only until the end of 2025)</b>	Support with financial literacy, finding accommodation and employment.

## **Aim**

***Empower care leavers to achieve financial stability and secure employment through early, consistent support in life skills and career readiness, ensuring a smoother transition into adulthood.***

“How might we improve access to and engagement with existing support and create stronger pathways between services to ensure care leavers receive coordinated, robust, and timely support?”

## **Intervention**

We aim to support care leavers aged 18 to 21 as they navigate a transition period that is often challenging and confusing for many. By co-designing interventions with both Leaving Care Advisors and care leavers, we hope to tackle a wide range of challenges that may emerge during this time, and understand what other support might be helpful beyond just financial and budgeting support.

These interventions could look like:

1. Conduct a comprehensive mapping of all existing support services for care leavers after they turn 21 and establish a regular multi-agency forum (including care leavers themselves) to improve coordination, referrals, and service visibility. This would foster a more integrated and responsive support ecosystem.
2. Encourage and empower care leavers to network and interact with each other (either through Youth Councils like Skittlz or other informal avenues) to allow them to naturally exchange knowledge and continue to build a strong sense of community and support.
3. Introduce a structured, age-appropriate life skills curriculum starting in early adolescence (e.g. age 11), covering topics like budgeting, saving, digital banking, and tenancy basics. This could include:
  - a. Learning tools to build financial confidence over time.
  - b. Interactive workshops in schools and youth settings.
  - c. Setting up some form of young person's savings account, in partnership with a financial organisation with a local presence.
4. Support care leavers' long-term independence by partnering with financial experts (existing experts within the Council, or via upskilling Leaving Care Advisors (LCAs)) to broaden their financial horizons and empower them to make informed financial decisions beyond immediate needs.

5. Launch a campaign to raise awareness of available support and encourage early engagement. As part of this, develop a mobile-friendly platform that consolidates information on rights, entitlements, and local services. Co-designed with care leavers, it might include interactive tools, FAQs, and referral pathways.

### **Expected outcomes**

- Improved financial literacy and budgeting skills from an earlier age.
- Greater housing stability through better preparation for tenancy responsibilities.
- Increased employment readiness and sustained job placements.
- Higher engagement with support services due to better visibility and access.
- Stronger multi-agency coordination and referral pathways into services.

### **Assumptions**

- Schools, carers, and residential providers will support the delivery of life skills and financial education.
- Care leavers will engage with support if it is accessible, relevant, and introduced early.
- Stakeholders are willing to collaborate in a multi-agency forum to improve coordination and referrals.
- Partnerships with financial institutions (e.g. local banks) can be established to support practical financial education.

## **Next Steps and Sustaining Outcomes**

### **Building the structures to drive this work**

[Tackling poverty is a complex problem that takes a system-wide approach to fix.](#) This cannot happen without creating the space to bring together key stakeholders. While the focus of this document is on what Council Services can do to refine our approach – we need to ensure local partners and our communities themselves are engaged and a critical part of designing our long-term vision.

Our first step will be to build on the Anti-Poverty Steering Group that formed to support the development of this work. A formal board will be established to monitor and drive the interventions outlined in this document, as well as future interventions that are developed. It will also be the place for emerging challenges and opportunities to be discussed – for example when new government decisions are made that relate to the poverty agenda.

Delivering this strategy also requires sustained investment in people and infrastructure over the long-term - without dedicated capacity, the ambition risks being unfulfilled. To drive and sustain meaningful change, we must embed resource planning in the delivery of this work.

### **Engaging with residents in our borough**

Keeping the experiences of those most affected by poverty at the heart of our strategy allows us to build more responsive, sustainable and effective interventions. To ensure our strategy remains grounded with real experiences, we aim to consistently engage with residents of Barking & Dagenham – particularly those with lived experience of poverty. Alongside this, we also aim to collaborate with local partners, community groups and service providers to capture a holistic picture of the evolving needs and challenges within the borough. We will be using appropriate research and engagement methods to ensure inclusive participation across the borough, such as community forums, interviews and focus group discussions, and digital surveys (including the potential continuation and expansion of the cost-of-living survey).

### **Measuring Impact and Our Approach to Learning**

Our approach to measuring impact is twofold. First, we will rigorously track and measure the outputs and outcomes from the individual interventions – applying cycles of learning to understand what has worked well, what hasn't, and why. We will develop a tailored evaluation

approach for each pilot and intervention using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. The aim will be to use quantitative methods wherever possible, depending on the availability of data. Where it is not possible to obtain reliable data or it isn't easy to track people's outcomes, we will take a more qualitative approach, using resident stories to demonstrate impact.

Due to intersectionality and cross-over between cohorts, residents might receive or experience more than one intervention, which we will aim to factor in when measuring impact of individual interventions. Measuring impact will help us refine our approach and implementation of the interventions, ensuring that resources are directed towards the most effective solutions.

Second, we will monitor broader, long-term indicators – in local, London-wide and national datasets and reports – that reflect the overall state of poverty in Barking & Dagenham. These longer-term indicators may include:

- Households Below Average Income (HBAI)
  - Relative poverty
  - Absolute poverty
  - Before and after housing costs
- Child Poverty Measures
  - Material deprivation
  - Income thresholds for families with children specifically

We will use these measures to ultimately engage stakeholders in meaningful dialogue and co-design new, relevant interventions. These insights will be built into new corporate plans and outcomes frameworks to ensure a strategic, data-informed response to poverty in the long term.

# Action Plan

Workstream	Action	Description	Deadline
Governance	<b>Publication of Strategy</b>	Finalise the <i>Foundations for Change: Tackling Poverty</i> document and submit it for Cabinet approval. Incorporate feedback from stakeholders. Upon Cabinet approval, publish the strategy	September 2025
Governance	<b>Recruit participant Board Members</b>	Identify and engage individuals with lived experience, community and voluntary sector partners, and subject matter experts – inviting them to join the governing Board for this area of work.	December 2025
Governance	<b>Set up cross-organisational Board</b>	Establish a governance board composed of partners working alongside the council. The Board will be a space where progress and impact of this strategy is measured, evaluation findings are reflected upon, and long-term thinking is developed to address entrenched barriers. It will also help shape future priorities and ensure shared accountability.	January 2026
Test-and-learn Approach	<b>Begin to run initial interventions</b>	Launch new interventions addressing recurring challenges across our target cohorts (for example, childcare costs, benefit cap, employment challenges)	September 2025
Test-and-learn Approach	<b>Set up evaluation framework</b>	Develop a framework to assess impact and outcomes, including quantitative KPIs and qualitative feedback – both for individual interventions and for the wider trends in the borough.	September 2025

Test-and-learn approach	<b>Measure success of interventions and iterate for future projects</b>	Evaluate the effectiveness of initial interventions using a dual approach: (1) intervention-specific metrics (e.g. uptake, satisfaction, immediate outcomes), and (2) alignment with 'Our B&D' indicators (e.g. child poverty, unemployment). Use findings to refine delivery and inform future pilots.	Ongoing from September 2025
Long-term plan	<b>Agree consensus with board members on drivers of poverty.</b>	Facilitate structured discussions with Board members to identify and agree on root causes of poverty in Barking and Dagenham, informed by local data and lived experience.	March 2026
Long-term plan	<b>Agree shared vision for tackling poverty in Barking and Dagenham</b>	Co-develop a vision that reflects a collective ambition to tackle poverty in the borough. Ensure the vision is inclusive, actionable, and aligned with the borough's wider priorities and values.	April 2026
Long-term plan	<b>Co-produce plan for long term approach to tackling poverty in Barking and Dagenham</b>	Collaboratively design a strategic roadmap for long-term poverty reduction. The plan will be co-produced with the Board and informed by Our B&D indicators to track progress on themes including child poverty. This will support the Board in continuing to identify long-term challenges and shape future priorities.	May 2026





## Key Definitions

Term	Definition
<b>Absolute Poverty</b>	A condition where household income is below a necessary level to maintain basic living standards (food, shelter, housing). In the UK, this is often measured against a fixed income threshold from a base year, adjusted for inflation.
<b>Bedroom Tax</b>	A reduction in housing benefit for social housing tenants deemed to have one or more spare bedrooms. Officially known as the under-occupancy penalty.
<b>Benefit Cap</b>	<p>The benefit cap limits how much most working age people can get from benefits.</p> <p>People could be affected if they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are working age</li> <li>• would get more in benefits than the cap</li> <li>• have children or live in an area with high private rents</li> </ul>
<b>Benefit Sanctions</b>	Penalties applied to claimants of certain benefits, such as Universal Credit, for not meeting specific conditions, like attending job interviews or training.
<b>Carer's Allowance</b>	A benefit for people who spend at least 35 hours a week caring for someone with substantial caring needs. The person being cared for must receive certain disability benefits. Carer's Allowance is £81.90 per week and can affect other benefits.
<b>Child Maintenance Service (CMS)</b>	A government service that handles child maintenance arrangements for parents who are separated and cannot agree on a private arrangement. CMS calculates, collects, and pays out child maintenance, ensuring parents who don't have day-to-day care of the child contribute financially to their upkeep.
<b>Child Poverty</b>	The percentage of children living in households with income below 60% of the median income. This measure is crucial for understanding the impact of poverty on younger generations.

<b>Child Tax Credit</b>	A benefit designed to help families with children. It is paid to those responsible for children under 16, or under 20 if they are in approved education or training. The amount received depends on income and circumstances. Child Tax Credit is being replaced by Universal Credit, and new claims can no longer be made.
<b>Cohort</b>	A group of individuals who share a common characteristic or experience.
<b>Consumer Price Index (CPI)</b>	The UK Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a measure of inflation, calculated by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), that tracks changes in the prices of goods and services purchased by households. It represents the cost of a "basket" of goods and services that households typically buy, with the aim of reflecting the average household's spending patterns.
<b>Cost of Living</b>	The amount of money needed to cover basic expenses such as housing, food, taxes, and healthcare. It reflects the cost of maintaining a certain standard of living in a particular area. In the UK, the cost of living has been significantly impacted by rising inflation, energy prices, and other economic factors.
<b>Council Tax Reduction</b>	A means-tested reduction in council tax for people on low incomes.
<b>Deep Poverty</b>	A term used to describe individuals or households with income significantly below the poverty line, often defined as living on less than 50% of the median income. Deep poverty indicates severe financial hardship and deprivation.
<b>Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)</b>	A government department responsible for welfare, pensions, and child maintenance policies. It administers various benefits, including the State Pension, and supports individuals moving from benefits into work. The DWP also provides support for those with disabilities and those who are ill.
<b>Deprivation</b>	A broader measure of poverty that includes lack of access to resources and opportunities, not just low income. The UK uses multiple indices of deprivation to assess this.
<b>Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)</b>	Additional financial support provided by local councils to help with housing costs for those receiving housing benefit or Universal Credit.
<b>Economically Inactive</b>	People who are neither employed nor unemployed; they are not in paid work, but they are also not looking for a job or available to start work. This group includes students, retirees, those who are long-term sick, and individuals looking after family or home.

<b>Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)</b>	A benefit for people who have a disability or health condition that affects how much they can work. ESA provides financial support if you are unable to work and personalised help to support you in work if you can.
<b>Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)</b>	a process used by organisations to evaluate the potential effects of their policies, practices, and activities on different groups of people, particularly those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. EIAs aim to identify and address potential negative impacts, ensuring that decisions are fair and do not create unnecessary barriers or disadvantages for any group.
<b>Food Bank</b>	A non-profit organisation that distributes food to those who have difficulty purchasing enough to avoid hunger.
<b>Food Poverty</b>	The inability to afford or access a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. This is a growing concern in the UK, with many relying on food banks.
<b>Fuel Poverty</b>	A situation where a household cannot afford to keep adequately warm at a reasonable cost, typically defined as spending more than 10% of income on energy bills.
<b>Homelessness</b>	The condition of lacking stable, safe, and adequate housing. This includes rough sleeping, temporary accommodation, and hidden homelessness (e.g., sofa surfing).
<b>Housing Benefit</b>	A means-tested benefit in the UK to help people on low incomes pay their rent.
<b>Incapacity Benefit</b>	A benefit that was paid to people who could not work due to illness or disability before January 31, 2011. It has been replaced by Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Existing claimants are reassessed to determine eligibility for ESA.
<b>Inflation</b>	Inflation is the rate of increase in prices over a given period of time.
<b>Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG)</b>	This term encompasses various activities and interventions that help individuals overcome barriers to learning and employment. It can include resources like career counselling, talks, and relevant documents, all aimed at helping people make informed decisions
<b>In-Work Poverty</b>	A situation where individuals are employed but their income is insufficient to lift them above the poverty line.
<b>Living Wage</b>	A wage that is high enough to maintain a normal standard of living. The UK has a National Living Wage, which is higher than the minimum wage and is intended to cover the basic cost of living.
<b>Local Housing Allowance (LHA)</b>	A form of housing benefit for private renters, based on local rental market rates.

<b>Material Deprivation</b>	A measure of poverty based on the inability to afford essential items and activities necessary for an acceptable standard of living. This includes things like adequate heating, proper clothing, and social participation.
<b>Means-Tested Benefits</b>	Benefits that are only available to individuals or households whose income and capital are below certain thresholds.
<b>Multiple Indices of Deprivation (IMD)</b>	A comprehensive measure of relative deprivation in small areas across the UK. It combines data on income, employment, education, health, crime, housing, and the living environment to rank areas from most to least deprived.
<b>Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET)</b>	Term used to refer to a young person who is no longer in the education system and who is not working or being trained for work.
<b>Pension Credit</b>	A means-tested benefit for people over State Pension age on a low income. It tops up weekly income to a minimum amount and can also provide additional support for housing costs, carers, and those with disabilities.
<b>Personal Independence Payment (PIP)</b>	A benefit designed to help with extra living costs if you have a long-term physical or mental health condition or disability. PIP is divided into two parts: daily living and mobility, and the amount received depends on how difficult you find everyday tasks and getting around.
<b>Poverty After Housing Costs (AHC)</b>	A measure of poverty that calculates household income after deducting housing costs such as rent or mortgage payments. This measure provides a clearer picture of disposable income and the financial strain caused by housing expenses.
<b>Poverty Before Housing Costs (BHC)</b>	A measure of poverty that calculates household income before deducting housing costs such as rent or mortgage payments. This measure helps to understand the income available to households before they meet their housing expenses.
<b>Poverty Premium</b>	The extra costs that people on low incomes often pay for essential goods and services, such as higher energy tariffs or expensive credit.
<b>Prevention or Relief Duty</b>	Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, local authorities have duties to prevent homelessness for those at risk (prevention duty) and to help secure accommodation for those who are already homeless (relief duty). These duties involve providing support and taking reasonable steps to find suitable housing.

<b>Relative Poverty</b>	A condition where household income is below 60% of the median income in a given year. This measure highlights individuals who are significantly worse off than the average person in society.
<b>Social Housing</b>	Affordable housing provided by local authorities or housing associations to individuals and families on low incomes.
<b>Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)</b>	Refers to children and young people who have learning difficulties or disabilities that require special educational support. This means they may need different educational provision from the mainstream system.
<b>Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)</b>	A minimum level of pay that employers must provide to employees who are off work due to illness.
<b>Temporary Accommodation</b>	Housing provided by local authorities for individuals or families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This can include hostels, bed and breakfasts, or short-term leased properties. The aim is to provide immediate shelter while a long-term solution is found.
<b>Two Child Benefit Cap</b>	This policy limits the amount of Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit a family can receive to support a maximum of two children. Families with more than two children born after April 6, 2017, will not receive additional financial support for the third or subsequent children.
<b>Universal Credit</b>	A social security benefit in the UK designed to simplify the welfare system and provide financial support to those on low income or out of work.
<b>Voluntary, Community Social and Faith Enterprise (VCSFE)</b>	A broad term that refers to organisations that are independent of the public sector and operate on a not-for-profit basis. This includes registered charities, community groups, social enterprises, faith-based organisations, and cooperatives. VCSFE organisations often work to address social issues, support communities, and deliver local services.
<b>Work Capability Assessment (WCA)</b>	An assessment used to determine eligibility for certain benefits, such as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), based on an individual's ability to work.

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