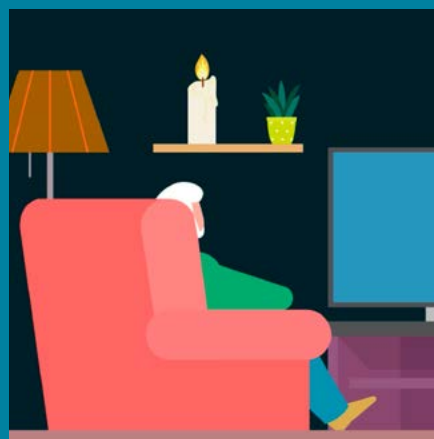
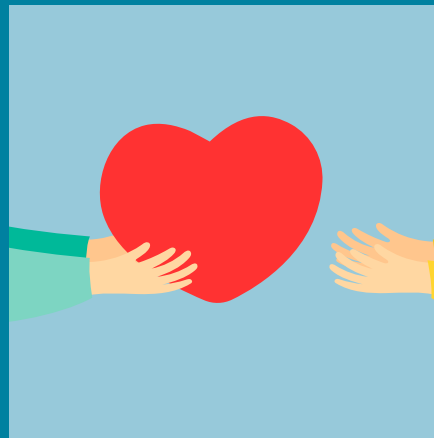


Kirklees Council

Director of Public Health

Annual Report 2022/2023: Poverty Matters



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction from Rachel Spencer Henshall, Director of Public Health

Welcome to my Director of Public Health Report for 2022/2023. In the current financial climate, it is really important to me that this year's report has a focus on poverty.



The COVID-19 pandemic shone a light on many pre-existing and deep-rooted inequalities. Within Kirklees and across the UK, we found that individuals and communities who were living in greater deprivation were more likely to be negatively impacted by COVID-19

As we emerged from the shadow of the pandemic, we quickly moved into the cost-of-living crisis. Global events have plunged many of us into circumstances which are beyond our individual control. Whilst many more people are experiencing financial hardship, we also know that the cost-of-living crisis is having the most significant impact on people who were already living in persistent poverty.

This report focuses on the lived experiences of Kirklees residents. We cannot understand and address the issues presented by poverty unless we involve the real experts – those with direct experience of poverty themselves. This report captures these lived experiences from residents, living across the borough in a range of circumstances. Where possible, we have used people's own words to tell their stories.

I would like to give a big 'thank you' to those residents who contributed to this report, for being so open and honest about your circumstances and feelings. This report is entirely built around your experiences and suggestions.

Why poverty matters

Poverty matters. Living in poverty has a significant impact on a broad range of health outcomes – including physical, mental and social health. Child poverty also has long-term 'scarring effects', meaning that those who experience child poverty have a greater risk of poor experiences as young adults and as they age.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation describes poverty as:

"Not being able to heat your home, pay your rent, or buy the essentials for your children. It means waking up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty, and impossible decisions about money. It means facing marginalisation – and even discrimination – because of your financial circumstances. The constant stress it causes can lead to problems that deprive people of the chance to play a full part in society."

At the heart of tackling poverty must be an understanding that those people who experience it first-hand should be at the centre of the process for influencing change and developing solutions. Poverty is a longstanding and complex policy and social issue, but more importantly it is a hard reality that many people are living with every day, including in Kirklees.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What our residents told us

Over the winter of 2022/23 we had extensive conversations with 12 Kirklees residents. In the context of unprecedented energy price rises and double-digit inflation, coming straight off the back of a global pandemic that troubled and touched all our lives, we wanted to know how people were coping. Was the system working for them? And how could it be improved?

- Those with children shielded them as best they could from harsh realities but couldn't afford many things for them. Parents were constantly going without for themselves so that they could at least afford the essentials for their children.
- Those who lived alone often felt isolated and unable to afford to socialise. Some seized opportunities to volunteer or spend time in the library in order to escape the cold and spend time with others.
- All felt restricted by the rising cost of food. Many were skipping meals, choosing damaged goods from the discount shelf or searching online to find the shops with the cheapest products that day.
- Poor health restricted some people's ability to work, leaving them frustrated, with no choice but to rely on benefits. Others were working and ineligible for benefits, yet their wages barely covered their bills.
- Around half the people we spoke to had borrowed money in the previous month; all those who had done so were planning to borrow more money next month. Almost all felt the financial situation would get worse before it got better.
- Heating homes was a major concern. Several people felt unable to put their heating on during the coldest months of the year but were also worried their homes would get damp and mouldy.
- People were immensely grateful for the kindness of others and several were keen to give something back, through involvement in community projects or foodbank donations, and found that doing good for others made them feel better.
- Pride and the stigma of being recognised prevented some from accessing help they knew was available. Others relied on family, or tried to find their own solutions, unaware of the help they could receive.

- No one we spoke to expected or demanded more than the minimum that would make their lives bearable. They were all trying their best to survive in the harshest of financial climates.

Our recommendations for action

Through conversations with residents, people living in poverty shared what would help make life easier:

- Support with the cost of living
- Valuing lived experience
- Ensuring access to services
- Prioritising person and community-centred support
- Providing help into employment
- Giving people spaces to connect
- Access to good quality, affordable homes

Below are just a selection of the recommendations from the report. A full list is available within the main report.

As a wider health and care system in Kirklees:

- Advocate and make the case for change needed to address systemic poverty and the need for bold, decisive and innovative solutions.
- Demonstrate a visible, shared and strategic commitment to tackling poverty from the highest levels across organisations.
- Develop opportunities for inclusive and sustainable economic change at a local level.
- Consider how local insight can be used to frame communications and improve access to services and support.
- Prioritise and utilise the lived experience and insight of people and communities impacted by poverty across all work.
- Continue to develop cross-organisational collaborative working and networking, creating ongoing opportunities for learning and reflection.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As an organisation working with Kirklees residents:

- Identify the need for, and promote uptake of, the full range of targeted statutory financial assistance that already exists.
- Adjust debt collection processes towards being sensitive to the financial and mental health needs of communities and customers.
- Think about how you could implement cash first options when supporting people with food or essentials as this allows residents the dignity of choice.
- Identify and provide early help to families with young children where childcare costs are leading to financial hardship.
- Engage and involve communities and the voluntary sector in the assessment of current services / interventions, and the development of new ones.
- Consider how to embed support with rising living costs into clinical pathways. This could include considerations around transportation and prescription charges, but also extending holistic assessments to include exploratory conversations around cost of living in a sensitive and non-stigmatising way.
- Explore opportunities for developing Poverty Aware Practice in your workforce.
- Join the Kirklees Tackling Poverty Partnership in order to find out more about local support and help and to connect with other organisations in Kirklees working with those experiencing poverty.
- Listen to and co-produce with people with lived experience of poverty. Develop your awareness by meaningfully engaging with people with lived experience, understanding what poverty means for them, their health, and how they use and access services.

As someone living in poverty:

- Access the [Kirklees Cost of Living Website](#) to see the full range of local and national support available.
- Talk to someone about what support might be available to you, e.g., Kirklees Citizens Advice and Law Centre.

What next

Poverty matters. It cannot be addressed by one thing alone – it requires commitment at a national, regional and local level, across systems. Because of these complexities, it can often feel like a problem which is too difficult to solve.

By listening to the stories of our residents and working together to implement the above recommendations, we can help to reduce inequalities and reduce the impact which poverty has on individuals, families and communities in Kirklees.

To read the full report, including direct quotes from the people we interviewed, go to www.kirklees.gov.uk/povertymatters.

As an individual or community group wanting to help people living in poverty:

- Read the Cost-of-Living Practice Guidance for front line staff, to find out more about having supportive and enabling conversations with Kirklees residents. To find out more about this work please contact CAS.Project@kirklees.gov.uk.
- If you are an individual who would like to volunteer to support people, contact [Third Sector Leaders](#) to find out more about how you can do this.

