



Poverty Proofing Policy

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1. Context and rationale

Poverty is a significant feature of UK society and affects many people in different ways. 24% of children in West Northumberland are growing up in poverty¹. While Hexham enjoys a reputation as an affluent place to live and has been named the 'happiest place in the UK', the reality for many families in our town is very different. West Northumberland Food Bank has seen the demand for help increase more than any other town in West Northumberland in the last year. Whilst low income and material deprivation are issues rightly at the forefront of the poverty debate, we recognise that poverty should not merely be reduced to a question of income or material well-being alone; it is also a matter of health and well-being. There is a complex, interlinking relationship between factors that define and influence poverty and these cannot be considered in isolation. For example, 32% of Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers experience the highest rates of in-work poverty nationally. 32% of disabled people in the UK experience poverty, compared to 20% of non-disabled people, while women are also more likely to live in poverty than men. The North East has the joint second-highest poverty rate in the UK at 25%².

2. Aims and objectives

The Poverty Proofing Policy will help to deliver a shared ambition of inclusive growth with our work focused on five complementary priorities:

- To enhance participation, capacity and empowerment across our communities.
- To collaborate with Hexham-based stakeholders to identify ways in which Hexham Town Council can use its influence to effect positive change and reduce poverty (including in-work, food and fuel poverty) in Hexham.
- To promote positive economic opportunities and outcomes.
- To support all residents to realise their full potential.
- To improve the health and wellbeing of our community.
- To ensure that all other Hexham Town Council policies, procedures and processes have been poverty-proofed prior to approval (see Section 3 for definition).
- Avoiding unintended consequences of inadequate poverty proofing.
- To consider the impacts Hexham Town Council decisions have on poverty within Hexham.

- To consider ways in which Hexham Town Council can alleviate poverty, particularly child poverty, within Hexham.
- To promote jobs, apprenticeships, work experience within Hexham.

3. How we will achieve our aims and objectives

Firstly, we acknowledge that effective poverty proofing cannot be achieved without consultation with and input from those most affected by poverty in Hexham. To that end, we aim to:

- Work proactively with Northumberland County Council and draw upon their considerable resources to support low-income households in Hexham.
- Work with West Northumberland Foodbank and No. 28 as a conduit to consult with and identify the needs of those living in poverty (“Nothing for us without us”)
- Poverty-proof all community engagement events to ensure full community inclusion.
- Poverty-proof proposed policies and procedures; in this sense, poverty proofing is defined as proactively identifying potential barriers to inclusion on the basis of income and discussing/agreeing ways in which to remove or minimise such barriers.
- Use social media and other lines of communication to signpost those experiencing poverty to funding and support.

Specific actions to encourage the participation of low-income households in the socio-cultural life of Hexham might include, but not be restricted to:

- Providing book vouchers for children from low-income households to coincide with Hexham Book Festival.
- Subsidising access to cultural programmes such as Hexham Jazz Festival and Hexham Abbey Festival.
- Working with West Northumberland Foodbank to encourage participation in activities linked to town twinning and, where possible, provide funding to subsidise participation.
- Working with stakeholders to try and ensure children can receive free school meals outside of term time.
- Working with Hexham Schools to extend the National Fruit Scheme to children over the age of seven for children on free school meals.
- Encouraging people into jobs via work experience or apprenticeships within Hexham.
- Working with stakeholders to support extracurricular activities that promote self esteem, confidence and skills that are recognised by employers such as the Duke of Edinburgh award.

4. Success criteria

We will monitor and evaluate the success of this policy by:

1. Keeping a record of all discussions around poverty-proofing of specific events, policies and procedures in the form of formal meeting minutes.
2. Developing ways in which to monitor the socio-cultural engagement of low-income families, including through collaboration with stakeholders such as West Northumberland Foodbank and No. 28.
3. Having a representative from Hexham Town Council at the AGM of West Northumberland Foodbank to evaluate the success of the policy in the broader context.

4. Documenting discussions and outcomes of activities related to objectives in the poverty proofing policy document.
5. Carrying out an annual review of the policy to assess its impact and consider any amendments that might be necessary to improve its effectiveness.

¹West Northumberland Foodbank, 2022

²Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2022

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