



and



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Dumfries & Galloway Council

Evaluation of the Impact of Dumfries & Galloway  
Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy 2015-2020

January 2021

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## 1. BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

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### Background

This document sets out an evaluation of Dumfries & Galloway Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy 2015-20 ("On the Up). The evaluation forms part of an integrated piece of work which has included two elements:

- To evaluate the council's Anti-Poverty Strategy 2015-20.
- To provide guidance and recommendations for the future including supporting the development of the new anti-poverty strategy 2021-26.

The evaluation therefore has a historic element in terms of considering the impacts of the strategy and learning from it in terms of "what works". In turn, this learning is intended to help guide the development of a new anti-poverty strategy.

The strategy document sets out a range of contextual issues and details and incorporates the following vision:

*"People will be prevented from falling into poverty, supported to escape from poverty; and able to lead independent, safe, happy and fulfilled lives".*

It sets out the following four objectives:

**Objective 1:** To listen to people and families experiencing poverty and make sure their voice is heard.

**Objective 2:** To support people experiencing poverty to move from dependence to independence.

**Objective 3:** To ensure our information and services are easy to access.

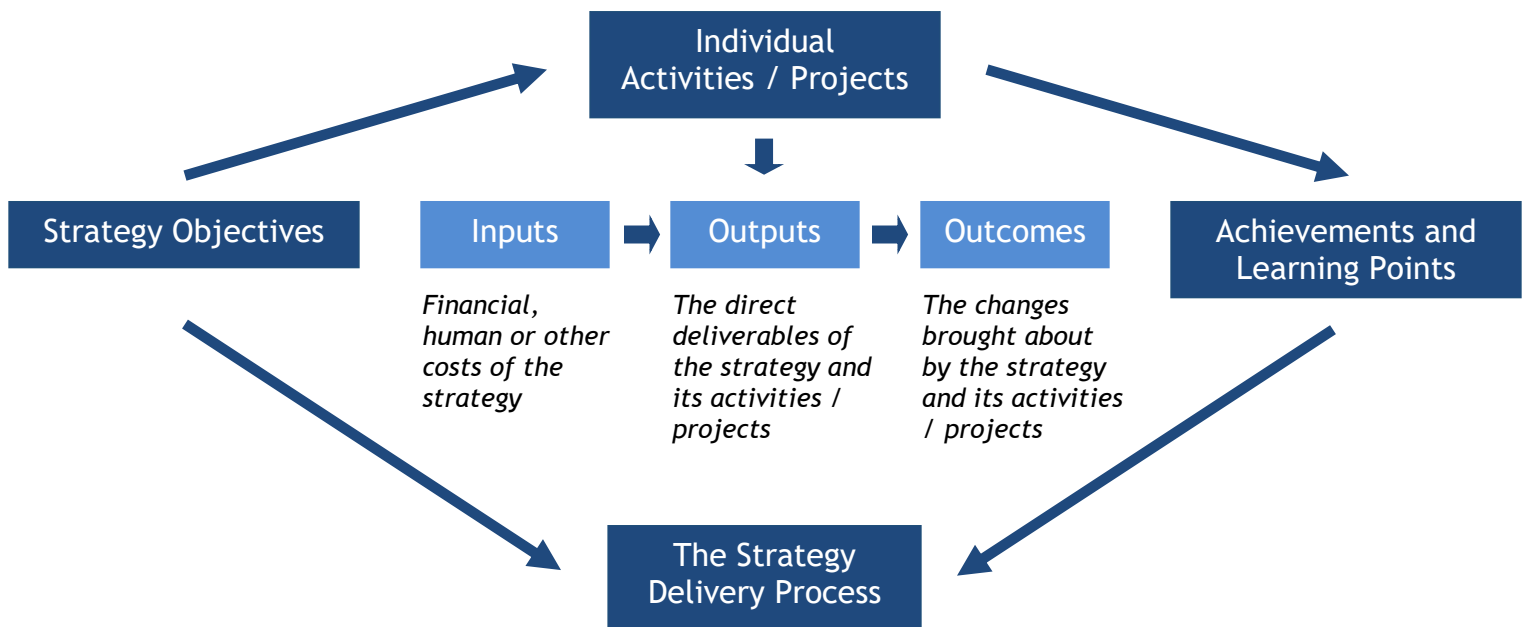
**Objective 4:** To provide services that meet the needs of people experiencing poverty.

The main part of this evaluation has been to assess the impact of the strategy in relation to these objectives.

## Evaluation Objectives

We have illustrated below our overall conceptual approach to the evaluation:

### Overview of the Evaluation Process



The above reflects the principle that the strategy should be evaluated against its overall objectives whilst also recognising a need to capture, where possible, what has been achieved by specific activities and projects. It also recognises that the evaluation should consider the “process” issues involved with strategy delivery (relating to issues such as objective setting, stakeholder engagement, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation and so on).

Key to the above is the implicit “logic model” for the strategy, which describes how it seeks to make a difference in relation to poverty. Thus, the strategic inputs (e.g. financial budgets, people’s time, other resources) are expected to lead to certain specific deliverables (e.g. services delivered, organisations supported, people provided with advice and supported) which in turn lead to specific “hard” and “soft” outcomes (e.g. income maximisation, improved financial management capability). The evaluation seeks to capture as much intelligence as possible on these outputs and outcomes, within the bounds of the information that is available.

The concept of the “counter factual” is key to the evaluation - the aim is to articulate how things have been different due to the strategy and its associated interventions and thus to capture insights into what “value” has been achieved in relation to the “costs” of the strategy. This process also includes assessment of “how” the strategy has been delivered, seeking to gauge if the outputs and outcomes achieved have arisen in the most efficient way.

## **Methodology**

The evaluation has been largely desk-based, drawing on the following:

- The strategy and its associated action plans.
- Internal papers and progress reports to council and its committees.
- Monitoring reports on specific areas of activity where available.
- Formal project reviews or evaluations where these are available.

In addition, we have also been able to draw on a series of consultations including: individual consultations with senior staff in the council; group consultations with staff involved in different aspects of the delivery of the strategy; group consultations with other public and third sector partners, who were typically involved in the council’s Anti-Poverty Forums (both at a local and region-wide level).

## **Report Structure**

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 sets out an overview of the strategy and what it has delivered.

Chapter 3 highlights a number of key impacts and achievements of the strategy.

Chapter 4 sets out an assessment of the various “process” issues relating to the strategy.

Chapter 5 sets out our recommendations arising out of the evaluation, which relate particularly to the development of a new and refreshed anti-poverty strategy.

## 2. DELIVERY OF THE STRATEGY

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### Overview of the Strategy

The “On the Up” strategy was adopted by Dumfries & Galloway Council in September 2015. It set out the following definition of poverty which reflects the “relative” nature of poverty and the specific impact it has on people’s lives:

Income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live. Because of their poverty they may experience multiple disadvantages through unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate health care and barriers to lifelong learning, culture, sport and recreation.

The vision detailed in the strategy is framed in terms of a description of the impact of the strategy:

People will be prevented from falling into poverty: supported to escape from poverty: and able to lead independent, safe, happy and fulfilled lives.

The Strategy set out four objectives. Objectives 1 to 3 included a number of subsidiary points that described how the objective would be pursued. Objective 4 contained a number of subsidiary thematic areas. These are detailed below.

**Objective 1: To listen to people and families experiencing poverty and make sure their voice is heard.**

- Developing new ways of getting feedback from people who use our services
- Talking to people facing poverty about their experiences, how we remove barriers to poverty, what works for them and what we need to do differently.
- Working with individuals experiencing poverty to help shape the solutions and help define front line service delivery that works.

**Objective 2: To support people experiencing poverty to move from dependence to independence.**

- Promote the use of positive messages and language
- Develop understanding and awareness of poverty
- Work with partners, communities and individuals on resilience and capacity building initiatives.

**Objective 3: To ensure our information and services are easy to access.**

- Improve the availability of information
- Increase the number of integrated services
- Improve the signposting between services
- Reduce the barriers to accessing information and service.

**Objective 4: To provide services that meet the needs of people experiencing poverty.**

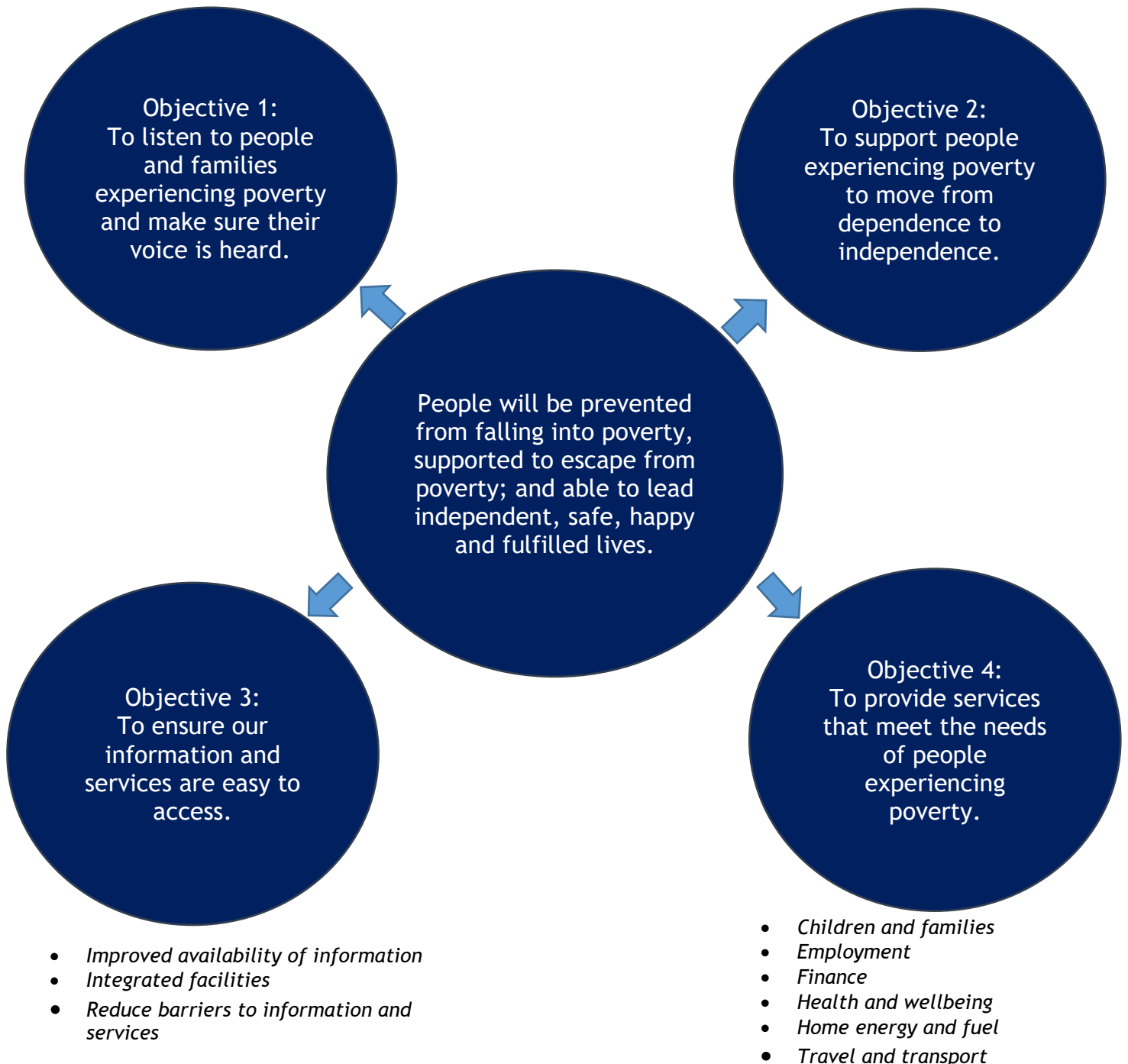
- Children and families
- Employment
- Finance
- Health and Wellbeing (material, psychosocial, behavioural)
- Home Energy and Fuel
- Travel and Transport

These objectives and the associated subsidiary points and themes are process-focused, describing **how** the Council seeks to address poverty whilst focusing less on any direct (and measurable) changes sought to people's lives.

## Framework for Delivery of the Strategy

- *New ways of getting feedback*
- *Talking to people facing poverty*
- *Working with individuals to shape solutions*

- *Develop understanding and awareness of poverty*
- *Resilience and capacity building*



The strategy also defines 7 “principles”: Respect, Resilience, Person Focussed, Sustainable, Shared, Communication.



The strategy noted that a number of Plans were already in place which would “deliver activities that will support this Strategy” and referenced these as an Appendix. A significant number of these strategies and plans were referenced: the Regional Economic Strategy; Financial Inclusion Strategy; Council Business Plans; Single Outcome Agreement; Children’s Services Plan; Health and Wellbeing Action Plan; Leisure and Sport Strategy; Community Learning and Development Strategy; Swestrans - Regional Transport Strategy and Delivery Plan; Community Transport Strategy; Public Transport Strategy; Health and Social Care Integration Strategic Plan; Cultural Strategy; Building Healthy Communities Strategy and Action Plan; Dumfries and Galloway College Outcome Agreement; Customer Service Strategy; Channel Shift Strategy; Local Housing Strategy; Communications Strategy. The appendix to the strategy document described briefly the relationship of each of these strategies and plans to the anti-poverty strategy.

The strategy envisaged the establishment of a “Community Planning Anti-Poverty Co-ordination Group” which would “deal with operational issues and problem solving around the Action Plan and....develop the partnership approach.” It was anticipated that this would include representatives of the “Financial Inclusion Working Group” from the time alongside “additional representatives of communities facing different types of poverty”. It was envisaged that this Group would report to the Community Planning Executive Group and the Strategic Partnership on an annual basis.

### **What the Strategy has Delivered - Initial Action Plan**

The initial phases of delivery of the Action Plan was based around a series of “projects or plans” relating to each objective, each of which contained a number of actions / milestones and the responsible department / service. These are tabulated below and on the following page:

#### **Objective 1: To listen to people and families experiencing poverty and make sure their voice is heard.**

Tackling Poverty Coordination Group;  
 Community Survey;  
 Operate service discussion groups across the region;  
 Utilise user and customer feedback.

**Objective 2: To support people experiencing poverty to move from dependence to independence.**

Poverty Awareness training;  
 Performance to be enhanced within Impact Assessment;  
 Develop inclusive agenda that incorporates confidence building initiatives, decreases stigmatisation and enhances ability;  
 Communicate “Challenging Myths of Poverty”.

**Objective 3: To ensure our information and services are easy to access**

Quick and visible identity for support services on buildings, services and information;  
 Deliver Community Hubs;  
 Develop new channels for information and support;  
 Educate Elected Members and DGC staff about services.

**Objective 4: To provide services that meet the needs of people experiencing poverty**

**Children and families**

Poverty Awareness training for staff in schools;  
 Reduce the extra costs within the school day.

**Employment**

Promotion of the Living Wage;  
 Operate “Youth Guarantee”.

**Energy and Fuel**

Promote the grants and support available for home improvements (insulation and energy efficiency);  
 Inform people about how to manage their energy use;  
 Support individuals / communities to improve efficiency of heating.

**Financial**

Poverty Awareness training and financial awareness training for pupils in schools;  
 Promotion of benefits advice services through communities;  
 Promote Credit Unions;  
 Develop transitional support arrangements.

**Health and Wellbeing**

Support food banks and meal providers;  
 Increase the safety of discounted consumer goods.

**Travel and Transport**

Enhance travel choices for residents;  
 Expand discounted travel;  
 Community Transport Support.

Consideration of the strategy's delivery naturally falls into two parts. The second part relates to the 2017 onwards Action Plan, which was developed following the initial experience of the strategy as the council ramped up its anti-poverty work and which remains to the present day the key controlling document for the delivery of the strategy. The achievements in relation to the key elements of that Action Plan are considered in subsequent sections. However, in advance of this, we have commented on the early achievements of the strategy from its adoption in late 2015 through to approximately mid-2017.

In relation to the objective of listening to people and families experiencing poverty and making sure their voice was heard, a key element of this was the establishment and initial support of a Tackling Poverty Coordination Group, consisting of officers of the council, third sector partners, external experts and people with lived experience of poverty.

The Tackling Poverty Reference Group grew out of this and was a key early achievement involving the recruitment of a regionwide group of service users with direct experience of poverty (and the group continues to play an important role in the strategy). The role of the group has been to provide input to decision-making from a "lived experience" perspective, helping to ensure that policy and practice reflects the real needs of people that have experienced poverty. From the outset, the group has "had the ear" of senior decision makers within the council.

As well as the establishment and work with the group, notable early "highlights" included the hosting of a National Poverty Alliance Networking event in November 2016 and initial development work on the establishment of a Public Involvement Strategy.

The most notable early achievement of the strategy in relation to supporting people experiencing poverty to move from dependence to independence included the commencement of poverty awareness training, this being delivered with each of Elected Members, officers and representatives of partner organisations having been involved in this.

The council's Service Review on Strategic Housing, Revenues, Benefits, Financial Advice, Housing Options and Homelessness was agreed in December 2015 and included recommendations around the development of Customer Service Hubs, "Tell Us Once" financial assessments, and a partner referral and tracking system.

The Customer Contact Service Review was completed in September 2016 and included service developments in relation to each of: assisted digital support; reducing avoidable contact; streamlining processes generally; and, more responsive services to those that need them most.

In relation to the objective of providing services to meet the needs of people experiencing poverty, much of the delivery over this period was undertaken via specific council services. A range of early achievements were identified in relation to this objective, including:

- Steps taken to reduce the costs of the school day (specifically in relation to home economics and technical subjects).
- Ensuring that all social care workers employed by providers commissioned by the council received the Living wage.
- Operation of the “Youth Guarantee” giving every young person leaving school the opportunity for employment and training.
- Promotion of grants for Home Improvements and for Energy Efficiency.
- Promotion and support of Credit Unions including the establishment of Salary Deductions Savings Schemes for council staff.
- Adoption of the Homelessness Service Improvement Plan in May 2016, which included targets in relation to homeless decisions and improved access to the service by ensuring 24-hour access to the service.

In addition, developmental work was undertaken at this stage in relation to areas such as: support for food banks and meal providers; enhanced travel choices for residents; and, community transport.

### **What the Strategy has Delivered - Action Plan from 2017 onwards**

The Action Plan used to guide the delivery of the strategy was refined over time and a formally revised Action Plan was adopted in late-2017, coinciding with the council’s appointment of an Anti-Poverty Officer to support the implementation of the strategy; this has provided the framework for the strategy delivery up to this point. This framework includes a hierarchy of “Objectives” (i.e. the four strategy objectives detailed above), subsidiary points and themes within each objective as set out in the strategy document, and “Improvement Projects”. To provide an overview of what the action plan has encompassed, we have detailed below the key elements of the Action Plan in relation to each objective along with an indication of the timescale over which each “Improvement Project” has been delivered.

This provides a clear picture of the extensive range of activity that has been delivered under the broad auspices of the strategy.

This overview for Objective 1 is set out below:

**Objective 1: To listen to people and families experiencing poverty and make sure their voice is heard<sup>1</sup>**

<b>1.1 Developing new ways of getting feedback from people that use our Services</b>	
<b>Improvement Project</b>	<b>Broad Timescale</b>
Continued support, management and development of the Tackling Poverty Coordination Group	September 2017 to the present day
Improve community participation and engagement across the council	October 2018 to the present day
<b>1.2 Talking to people facing poverty about their experiences, how we remove barriers to poverty, what works for them and what we need to do differently</b>	
<b>Improvement Project</b>	<b>Broad Timescale</b>
Remove barriers to Services for people experiencing poverty	September 2017 to the present day
<b>1.3 Working with individuals experiencing poverty to help shape the solutions and help define frontline service delivery that works</b>	
<b>Improvement Project</b>	<b>Broad Timescale</b>
Increased support to vulnerable families and victims of those in the justice system	September 2017 to March 2019
Support to Tackling Poverty Reference Group	September 2017 to the present day

The activities allocated to Objective 1 have included a mix of engagement and participation activity alongside other activities.

<sup>1</sup> Specific research and evaluation activities relating to the strategy including this Evaluation Report, the development of a new Strategy and a refreshed report on levels of poverty and deprivation within Dumfries & Galloway are also included as “Improvement Projects” within this heading.

An overview of Objective 2 is set out below:

**Objective 2: To support people experiencing poverty to move from dependence to independence**

<b>2.1 Develop understanding and awareness of poverty</b>	
<b>Improvement Project</b>	<b>Broad Timescale</b>
Delivery of Poverty Awareness Training	September 2017 to August 2019
Raise the profile of Challenge Poverty week	Within each of 2017 to 2020
Successfully deliver a tackling Poverty in Dumfries and Galloway conference	April to October 2017
<b>2.2 Work with partners, communities and individuals on resilience and capacity building initiatives</b>	
<b>Improvement Project</b>	<b>Broad Timescale</b>
Distribute the enhanced poverty provision fund through Participatory Budgeting	Three phases from 2017 onwards
Improving our communities in Tackling Poverty and Inequalities through Area Committees	Annually over period of plan
Develop the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan	April 2016 to September 2018
Annual Reports on Local Outcomes Improvement Plans	April 2018 onwards
Develop and monitor a Commission on Representation and Engagement	April 2018 to March 2030

It is worth noting that in addition to the various promotional and reporting elements described here, two substantial elements of delivery include the Participatory Budgeting and Area Committee funding, which have supported a wide range of community activity. This is described in detail in Section 3.

An overview of the elements of Objective 3 is set out below:

**Objective 3: To ensure our information and services are easy to access**

<b>3.1 Improved availability of information</b>	
<b>Improvement Project</b>	<b>Broad Timescale</b>
Poverty Awareness Training for staff in schools	August 2015 to March 2017
Develop new channels for information and support to remove barriers to people experiencing poverty	April 2017 to March 2020
Delivery of a “Customer Hub”	August 2019 onwards (project currently on hold due to Covid)
Prepare both clients and partner organisations to successfully manage the transition to Universal Credit	September 2017 to March 2019
<b>3.2 Increased number of integrated facilities</b>	
<b>Improvement Project</b>	<b>Broad Timescale</b>
Develop Family Centres at Lochside (Dumfries) and Park School Children’s Services Centre (Stranraer)	April 2017 to March 2020
<b>3.3 Reducing barriers to accessing information and services</b>	
<b>Improvement Project</b>	<b>Broad Timescale</b>
Implementation and continuation of the Welfare and Housing Options Support Project	September 2017 onwards
Implement the Housing Options and Homeless Service Improvement Team following the Service Review	September 2017 to March 2019

Activity allocated to this objective has included a mix of training and service improvement and delivery activity.

Within Objective 4 a wide range of activities have been delivered and these are described on the following pages for each subsidiary theme:

**Objective 4: To provide services that meet the needs of people experiencing poverty**

<b>4.1 Children and Families</b>	
<b>Improvement Project</b>	<b>Broad Timescale</b>
Completion of annual Local Child Poverty Action Plan report	January 2019 onwards
Increasing the amount and availability of free school clothing grants and increasing registrations for these and free school meals	April 2019 to March 2020
Delivery of the anti-poverty Family Support Team intervention activities	September 2017 to March 2020
Extension of the Food in Schools project to include holiday meals and During Study support	April 2018 to March 2019
Home Economics and Technical Subjects	April 2018 to March 2019
Extra-Curricular Travel	June 2018 to June 2019
Removal of Period Poverty - Free Sanitary Products in Schools	August 2018 to March 2019
Pupil charges for other curricular subjects linked to national qualifications in the senior phase	June 2018 to June 2019
Delivery of the Better Eating, Better Learning Free Breakfast Clubs project	September 2017 to October 2019
Assess applications to the Council's Town Centre Living Fund	September 2017 to March 2019
Holiday Food Fund project	April 2020 onwards
School Clothing Grants	April 2020 onwards
Improve community participation and engagement across our council	October 2018 onwards
<b>4.2 Employment</b>	
<b>Improvement Project</b>	<b>Broad Timescale</b>
Raise the profile of the Living Wage	September 2017 to March 2018
Deliver the Links to Work project	September 2017 to March 2020
Development of the Increasing Employment Opportunities of People with Offending Behaviours project	September 2017 to March 2019
Secure Living Wage accreditation for our council	June 2015 to April 2018



4.3 Finance	
Improvement Project	Broad Timescale
Monitor the number of clients assisted with debt advice through commissioned services <sup>2</sup>	Ongoing
Value of additional benefits through Financial Inclusion Advice Income Maximisation and DASGCAS commissioned service <sup>3</sup>	Ongoing
Credit Union Development	April 2018 to March 2020
Protect people from financial harm and abuse	September 2017 to March 2020
Promote Credit Unions	September 2017 to March 2020
Mitigating the consequence of Welfare Reform - Increased provision of Crisis Payments and Community Care Grants	April 2018 to March 2020
4.4 Health & Wellbeing	
Improvement Project	Broad Timescale
Development of Annual Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP)	April 2017 to March 2018
Annual Reports on Locality Plan for food sharing	April 2018 onwards
Supporting Fareshare in Dumfries & Galloway	July 2019 onwards
Participation in the National Menu for Change project	September 2019 onwards
Number of affordable new homes agreed through the SHIP process <sup>4</sup>	Ongoing
Reduce poverty in the Private Housing Sector by creating property condition leaflets	Ongoing
4.5 Home Energy & Fuel	
Improvement Project	Broad Timescale
Reducing fuel poverty by delivering the HEEPS ABS project <sup>5</sup>	Ongoing
Number of capital measures delivered each financial year	Ongoing

<sup>2</sup> Described as “Key Performance Indicator” rather than “Improvement Project” within Action Plan

<sup>3</sup> Described as “Key Performance Indicator” rather than “Improvement Project” within Action Plan

<sup>4</sup> Described as “Key Performance Indicator” rather than “Improvement Project” within Action Plan

<sup>5</sup> Described as “Key Performance Indicator” rather than “Improvement Project” within Action Plan

4.6 Travel & Transport	
Improvement Project	Broad Timescale
Develop a Public Social Partnership model which is a collaborative approach between the public and third sector to redesign, pilot and procure services based around the needs of service users	January 2017 to March 2020
Distribution of additional Crisis Grants	April 2019 to March 2020
Enhance travel choices for residents	September 2017 to March 2020
Expand discounted travel	September 2017 to March 2020
Taxi Card Scheme	April 2019 onwards
Community Transport	April 2020 onwards

Since 2017, the Action Plan has recorded this activity on a cumulative basis, including where specific project activity has been completed. This provides for strong project management and tracking, with a clear picture of progress in relation to delivery being apparent at any stage. Our review of the half year Performance Report on the Action Plan to September 2020 identified that the vast majority of the “Improvement Project” activities described above had either been delivered or were on track to be delivered (the only significant exception was in relation to the delivery of a “Customer Hub” which is currently on hold due to Covid-19 restrictions).

### Financial and Other Inputs

The council’s specific and incremental funding of the anti-poverty strategy in each year has been in the broad region of £1m. In recent years, this has included:

- Allocations for specific anti-poverty interventions that are not service specific.
- Funding allocated for delivery through Participatory Budgeting
- Anti-poverty funding allocations through Area Committees
- Additional funding for specific interventions delivered by services.

Albeit the details have changed from year-to-year, this has been the general pattern of allocated spend over this period.

For illustrative purposes the budget allocation for the current year is as follows:

Area of Identified Need	Budget Allocation (£'000)
School Clothing Grants	100
Taxi cards	70
Participatory Budgeting funding	200
Area Committee funding	200
Poverty and deprivation research	30
Support to tackling Poverty Reference Group and Coordination Group	10
Welfare and Housing Options Support Team	55
Community Transport	40
Unallocated (for other project activity)	360
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,065</b>

In addition to the approximate £1m per annum that has been invested in the strategy, one-off funding of £2m was also allocated over the 2017-2019 period to address specific issues, broken down thus:

Additional Specific Funding	Budget Allocation
Intensive Family Support Service	1,200,000
Home Energy Help Project	250,000
Mitigation of the Impact of Full Universal Credit Roll Out, Welfare and Housing Options Support	175,335
Housing Options and homeless Service Improvement Team	294,500
Additional support, training and other costs	80,165
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,000,000</b>

The council has directly invested approximately £7m in directly identifiable anti-poverty work over the five year period of the strategy.

In addition, it is anticipated that a substantial (though not easily quantifiable) amount of officer and staff time will have been applied to the various activities that the strategy has encompassed.

### 3. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

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#### Introduction

The detailed overview set out in Section 2 provides an insight into the extensive scope of activities that have been delivered or driven under the auspices of the strategy (and of the broad financial inputs associated with this).

In addition, however, it is important to consider what these activities and inputs have achieved. In other words, to provide some assessment of the outputs and outcomes where the “outputs” are the specific deliverables (e.g. services delivered, organisations supported, people provided with advice or support) which lead to specific “hard” and “soft” outcomes (e.g. income maximisation, improved financial management capability). There has not hitherto been a specific separation of these outputs and outcomes and so we report on them together in relation to the key themes and objectives of the strategy.

#### Quantitative Outputs and Outcomes

Identifying and collating the quantitative outputs and outcomes of the strategy at the present time presents certain challenges. In part, this is a reflection of the ongoing nature of some projects and of the extent to which they have been able to capture such information in a proportionate way. Other activities do not lend themselves to quantitative assessment. Overall, as we note in the following sections, the articulation of objectives and current monitoring approaches have only partially lent themselves to such a quantitative assessment.

However, we have been able to identify various such achievements (relating both to direct outputs and the changes they have brought about in terms of outcomes) and have detailed the main examples below. These achievements have been collated under the heading of the four objectives of the strategy.

Objective 1: To listen to people and families experiencing poverty and make sure their voice is heard

The involvement of volunteers with lived experience of poverty through the **Tackling Poverty Reference Group** has been a notable achievement of the strategy. In the consultations that we undertook as part of the evaluation it was clear that decision-makers within the council had valued the inputs provided by Reference Group members and also that those members have all felt that their experiences, and their ideas arising out of those experiences have been taken seriously. Examples of this have included the feedback that was received on volunteers' input to the Tackling Poverty Conference mentioned below and in terms of their influence in securing the COSLA Excellence Award for the strategy (also as noted below). The development of the Reference Group (individually and collectively) has also been apparent in their willingness to make contact directly with senior council officers on occasions where they have not felt that their voice has been heard.

There were thirteen volunteers originally within the Tackling Poverty Reference Group, with this figure now being nine, following the passing of two of the original volunteers and two others retiring from the group for reasons of ill health. Whilst recognising that this is a relatively small number of individuals, it still allows for a range of "lived experience" perspectives to be brought to bear and there have been evident benefits (albeit these are "soft" and so far unquantified) both in terms of the empowerment and capacity building of group members, and their influence on decision-making.

The Tackling Poverty Reference Group has been a relatively high profile example of "listening to people and families experiencing poverty" but it has by no means been the only example. There has been a growing culture of engagement with service users and others facing the challenges that poverty brings over the course of the strategy's implementation to date, with selected examples of this having included: development and dissemination of detailed Case Studies relating to the support delivered by the Welfare and Housing Options Support Team; a detailed evaluation of the Intensive Family Support Service which featured heavily the feedback received from service users; and, the evaluation of the Free School Meals approach during the Covid-19 pandemic which, again, drew heavily on case studies and other inputs.

Objective 2: To support people experiencing poverty to move from dependence to independence

The **Understanding Poverty Course** delivered by the Poverty Alliance was offered to all staff and there had been 795 attendees at the time of the formal evaluation, this being across 29 separate sessions. 97% of participants indicated that the training had fully met the learning objectives, which related to: a better understanding of poverty; increased compassion for people experiencing poverty; knowledge of how to tackle misconceptions about poverty; identification of changes and improvements to work practices.

The course was also offered to all of the council's Elected Members. 64% of those that attended indicated that it had fully met the learning objectives.

The **Tackling Poverty in Dumfries & Galloway Conference** in October 2017 brought together 174 delegates and included a mix of speakers from national organisations as well as inputs from the volunteers on the Tackling Poverty Reference Group. The conference objectives related to: widening awareness of the causes of poverty and how it impacts on individuals and families; getting the right people and organisations together to positively deal with poverty; and, to provide inspirational examples of how, with the right innovation and commitment, people in poverty could have their lives changed for the better. 71% of participants at the conference felt able to indicate that all of these objectives had been met.

To date, 96 projects have been awarded **Participatory Budgeting Funding** to tackle poverty over the course of three funding rounds since 2018, with funding allocated on a local basis according to an agreed formula. The outputs and outcomes of such activity occur in two distinct ways. In the first instance, there is participation in the process itself and, following on from this, outputs and outcomes associated with the delivery of those projects that are successful in achieving funding.

The initial call for proposals (under the first year theme of “People Tackling Poverty”) attracted 60 project proposals in total (it is worth noting that 16 of these were collaborative proposals highlighting the potential for the process to assist in encouraging partnership working). Following an initial sift of proposals, 48 proceeded to the public voting stage, of which 25 were awarded funding. The process was successful in engaging local people with 109 people attending events where they could vote in person and 2,662 individuals successfully registering to vote online of whom 1,616 successfully cast a vote. A total of 1,725 people therefore took part in this participatory process.

A set of criteria and outcomes for the project were set by the Steering Group that managed the process and the projects tackled themes such as: low income and financial poverty; food poverty; fuel poverty, rurality and isolation; and, access to information and educational activities and opportunities. These projects have enabled local delivery of services (e.g. school holiday breakfast and lunch clubs, transport support, ICT training), have facilitated direct support to individuals in need (e.g. emergency power payments, equipment to allow participation in educational activities, emergency food parcels) and have also helped local organisations to improve their capacity through training and similar support.

The individual funding amounts per project are relatively modest but direct engagement with these projects in the future will help to more effectively gauge and assess how their activities have contributed to outputs and outcomes.

**Anti-Poverty Grant Funding** is also distributed through the council’s Area Committee structures. In the most recent full year, this supported 47 projects across the four areas with total funding allocated of £195,000 (an average figure of approximately £4,149 per project. Each Area Committee adopts its own criteria for grant funding with a view to recognising particular local needs and priorities although, in all cases, the need for projects to be consistent with the overall anti-poverty strategy and its objectives is stipulated. This funding, though modest in terms of the average amount for each individual project, has certainly been successful in signalling to the community and third sector the council’s wish to place a high priority on anti-poverty work and to encourage others to do likewise. Again, a very diverse set of projects has been funded. Quantitative data is generally captured on numbers of beneficiaries with write-in commentary being sought on the achievements of individual projects. This has not always easy to codify and quantify given the modest amounts involved in relation to individual projects and the ongoing nature of these projects.

Objective 3: To ensure our information and services are easy to access

The work undertaken by the **Welfare and Housing Options Team** resulted in £454,000 additional annual benefits being sourced and £90,000 of one-off awards. It is estimated that 80 evictions were prevented (each of which would be likely to have had very substantial additional “hidden” costs). The work of the council’s Financial Wellbeing and Revenues Service was recognised by it winning the Institute of Revenue, ratings and Valuation UK Team of the Year Award for Excellence in Social Inclusion (the citation for this Award identified the Welfare and Housing Options Team as playing a crucial role in providing client support).

The council undertook a substantial review of its **Housing Options and Homeless Service** in 2016. The changes made were reviewed by the Scottish Housing Regulator in a report published in December 2019 which concluded that the service had: “significantly improved the service and has a clear plan to deliver further improvement.” The review noted that the Council and its Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners had significantly increased the number of settled lets made to people who are homeless and had reduced both the number of people waiting more than a year for an outcome and the length of time spent by people in temporary accommodation. The Regulator’s report specifically identifies the introduction of the Welfare and Housing Options Team as an example of “Positive Practice” in order to improve tenancy sustainment and prevent homelessness, noting that, at the end of 2019, the team had received 441 referrals and had supported 316 customers who were experiencing financial difficulties.

Objective 4: To provide services that meet the needs of people experiencing poverty

Within Dumfries & Galloway, there was an increase between July 2019 and December 2020 of 1,170 children and young people registered to receive **Free School Meals**. This was achieved through a range of initiatives including an education and Welfare and Benefits Team matching exercise to locate families who were eligible for this support but had not previously applied (and thus demonstrating an excellent example of what can be achieved through “partnership working”, albeit the “partnership” in this instance was internal to the council).



The council's Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Team undertook additional marketing to help increase the number of new recipients. Registration for this support also results in the benefit of the Free School Meal Payments which have been allocated during the period of school closures brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the additional support payment of £100 allocated by the Scottish Government in December 2020. Receipt of Free school meals also brings with it the additional benefit of the annual School Clothing Grant which is set at £134 per annum (which we understand to be one of the highest rates paid by Local Authorities in Scotland at this time).

The final report on the Intensive Family Support Service shows that the service had 262 referrals from 127 families. A wide range of positive outcomes were noted including: improved home conditions (118 cases), increased attendance at health appointments (81 cases) and improved parental understanding of children's needs (114 cases). This support is a good illustration of where early intervention seems likely to have resulted in the saving of substantial future costs by, for example, avoiding the costs of children being taken into care, avoiding the costs of evictions, avoiding the costs of other legal processes (although these impacts remain unquantified). In this way, the service has been of benefit both to service user and service deliverer.

Support provided through the Credit Union Development Officer post and the council's Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Team contributed to an increase of 165% in membership of the Solway Credit Union between 2015 and the end of the period for which the post was funded in 2019. Direct Payment schemes have been put in place for Dumfries & Galloway Council, Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership and other organisations throughout the region, which have contributed to this.

Free Breakfast Clubs (the "Morning Snack" Initiative) in Primary and Secondary schools were piloted as part of the anti-poverty strategy. Evaluation of the pilot showed that over 97% of school staff reported that the provision was well received and that take-up was good. Specifically:

- 69% of schools indicated that their breakfast provision had benefitted those pupils who were most in need.
- 25% of teachers reported that the breakfast provision had improved the concentration of those attending.
- 96% of parents expressed a desire for the initiative to continue.

The particular approach of ensuring that pupils are able to access this support in a stigma-free fashion is noted. 57% of Primary and Secondary Schools now have either a Breakfast Club or a Morning Break Initiative or a mixture of both throughout the region.

15 organisations within Dumfries and Galloway are now supported with the costs of Fareshare membership and associated delivery costs (the Fareshare project is managed by the Moving On organisation from their Glasgow depot). Over the period from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 to 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020, this arrangement resulted in 210 tonnes of food being delivered into Dumfries & Galloway, which equates to 500,010 meal portions and £750,015 in terms of the value of stock delivered (which is then distributed onwards to those most in need).

Over 12,500 items of clothing have been donated and redistributed through the Free School Uniform Bank and Warm Winter Clothes Project, which has been coordinated by the council's Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Team. Alongside other organisations, since 2018. This project is designed specifically to ensure that families, children and young people can receive the additional clothing through collection points where anonymity is guaranteed (over the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, a service has been developed which allows for delivery of clothing direct to the doorstep). The Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Team also played a lead role, working alongside colleagues elsewhere in the council and in the community sector, in distributing to people in need c. £250,000 of counterfeit clothing goods that were seized by Police Scotland and passed on to colleagues in Trading Standards.

The Taxi-Card Scheme, which is supported by anti-poverty funding, has assisted 2,095 individuals in need each year in order to ensure that they have the ability to travel to make any medical appointments, as well as to attend meetings with the Department of Work and Pensions, housing providers and other agencies.

### **Qualitative Outputs and Outcomes**

Based largely on our consultations with colleagues (both internally and outwith the council) we are able to identify a number of significant qualitative achievements of the strategy:

- Poverty has been placed on the political agenda in a way that it wasn't previously, and is ensuring that action on poverty is seen as essential across different political parties.

- The very existence of the strategy demonstrated management and political commitment and helped to embed an anti-poverty culture within the council.
- Stakeholders have been able to marshal support for new work by demonstrating its fit with the strategy - which has given it political cover and support, and the strategy has created opportunities for new work; this has been evident both within and outwith the council.
- The strategy has been the basis for challenging claims that there is little power to tackle poverty locally and has illustrated the sorts of activities that can have a positive impact.
- The strategy has enabled greater prioritisation of poverty in the LOIP (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan).
- The Strategy's focus on issues such as listening to the community, capacity building and challenging stigma have all been recognised and well received.
- In particular, the strategy has helped to foster a culture of placing service users and those with lived experience at the heart of decision making.

The achievements of the strategy have previously been recognised externally, most notably with it winning the COSLA Excellence Award in 2018 for “Tackling Inequalities and Improving Health”.

### **Key Points in relation to the Achievements of the Strategy**

The strategy and its associated interventions has delivered a wide range of direct deliverables (i.e. “outputs”) and it is has been possible in some (though not all) cases to articulate the achievements of the strategy in terms of the changes it has brought about for individuals, communities or organisations (i.e. “its “outcomes”). The diversity of these outcomes is a reflection of the multi-faceted way in which poverty manifests itself.

Typical outputs have related to the delivery of services and other support. They have, in turn, generated a number of what might reasonably be termed “intermediate outcomes” including, for example, increased participation or take-up levels of services,

improved awareness and understanding of poverty, wider engagement and capacity building and so on.

The achievements of the strategy have been most telling when it has been possible to demonstrate how these outputs and intermediate outcomes have led to into tangible outcomes that impact positively on people's lives (both in relation to "hard" outcomes such as income maximisation, reduced evictions and so on and to "soft" outcomes in terms of people's sense of dignity). Similarly, it is where the strategy has brought clear additionality and added value to the anti-poverty effort that its impact has been greatest.

## 4. PROCESS ISSUES

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### Scope of the Strategy and Relationship to Other Strategies

Poverty is impacted on by a wide range of issues that are within the scope of work of local authorities and other public agencies and so there are often ambiguities as to what activities might sit within the bounds of an anti-poverty strategy and which might sit elsewhere. There have clearly been many projects delivered within Dumfries & Galloway over recent years that have helped to address poverty but it is not always clear or certain whether the anti-poverty strategy has “added value” to these interventions or whether they have essentially taken place in parallel.

Whilst recognising that wider strategies, functions and policies have a significant potential impact on poverty, we believe that the overall anti-poverty approach for Dumfries & Galloway will have greatest impact, and add greatest value, when it is tightly focused on addressing those issues that are most obviously located in anti-poverty work rather than in other strategies.

In practice, this would mean that, despite their impact on poverty, actions in areas such as housing provision, employability and economic development would not be specifically included in this new approach, belonging more clearly in their own relevant Strategies (though our approach would call for the poverty-proofing and auditing of such Strategies).

By contrast, family support projects, which are about building broad resilience, and which often support people to deal with the financial challenges they face, would be a specific element of the proposed approach.

### Definition of Objectives

Three of the four current strategy objectives are articulated in “process” terms. That is to say, they articulate what the council will *do*: listen to people and families; support people experiencing poverty; provide services. The other is articulated in terms of what the council will *achieve*: ensure that information and services are easy to access.

Whilst the strategy and its associated action plan provides a clear agenda for actions to be taken, the articulation of the objectives in this manner does not lend itself to the effective measurement of what has been achieved in terms of real impacts on individuals, communities and organisations and thus limits the extent to which the value of the various interventions can be assessed. This, in turn, militates against the gathering and use of intelligence to direct resources where they can have the greatest impact.

In some instances, specific activities and projects have adopted objectives in the form of measurable outcomes (this has sometimes been explicit and sometimes implicit). However, these are necessarily diverse and there is not at present a suite of measurable outcome indicators (derived from the objectives) against which success can be assessed. The next stage of development of anti-poverty work should seek to address this.

### **Structures and Engagement**

The **Tackling Poverty Coordination Group** was originally conceived of as involving a mix of service users with direct experience of poverty, expert advisers, council officers and representatives of the third sector. Its original work plan focused on three areas including: assisting services to deliver the actions in the Anti-Poverty Action Plan; developing and recommending actions and plans; implementing a Participatory Budgeting approach to deliver projects and service improvements. Over time, its role appears to have been diluted and it has not generally been a forum that has driven action or changes to the strategy, which has meant that some stakeholders have not committed to it as they might.

The **Tackling Poverty Reference Group** is a key influencing body in the structures, and there is a general commitment to the value of the lived experience of its members being heard in the process. Stakeholders believe that it has been a significant achievement to get the group into a situation in which it is contributing so significantly to the delivery of the strategy and it is particularly noteworthy the extent to which participants in the group have felt that they have been genuinely listened to. However, there may be a need to ensure broader input into decision making and also to ensure that this is complemented by a robust, evidence-based approach.

The Council has **Tackling Poverty Forums** that act as a useful means of sharing information and experience. However, there is limited involvement of stakeholders within these forums in scrutinising and developing the strategic approach on an ongoing basis and they have generally acted as a conduit for information exchange. This is of value in its own right but there may be scope to deepen the role of these forums.

### **Activity Identification and Resource Allocation**

In part due to the issues around clarity of objective setting which we have noted previously, there has been only a limited focus (at least in an overall sense) on how specific areas of work might be prioritised and on the basis that resources might be allocated. The approach of encouraging ideas from various sources (communities through Participatory Budgeting, the third sector through Area Committee funding and council departments) is to be welcomed. However, this would work better if such responses were in response to specific defined objectives (and associated measurable) and if there were a clearer and more consistent range of criteria as to how resource allocation decisions might be taken (for example, taking account of numbers and profile of beneficiaries, the nature of the work to be undertaken and considering who might be best placed to deliver certain interventions).

The current approach of inviting ideas from such sources does not necessarily foster a collective approach to addressing specific challenges, which was a key message from the consultations that we undertook as part of the evaluation. It will be important to consider how such a collective approach can be fostered and how this might then relate to resource allocation decisions.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The process of monitoring delivery of the strategy is very strong. There is a clear Action Plan, which evolves to recognise new work and this is continually monitored and reported on, allowing for remedial action to be taken when necessary.

However, the process for capturing and collating the outputs (i.e. direct deliverables) and outcomes (the changes brought about) of activity undertaken within the auspices of the strategy are more limited. Whilst feedback is sought in relation to individual projects this is generally provided in a relatively unstructured form. This provides useful insights into those projects but is limited in terms of allowing for comparison of the real value of each project and how these compare, thus limiting the value of this for future decision making.

In part due to pressure on resources, it is unclear the extent to which the feedback that is received currently is used in a learning sense, to generate new ideas and drive changes in practice.

### **Administrative Support to the Strategy**

In the early stages there were some administrative challenges to the delivery of the strategy, and even now the burden of supporting the above structures falls on a pressured staff resource. It will be important to ensure that the delivery of the strategy is appropriately supported as it evolves and develops.



## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

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The foregoing review has highlighted the impressive scope of work that has been delivered (and continues to be delivered) as a result of the anti-poverty strategy. It has illustrated the positive changes in organisational attitudes and knowledge and the extent of improved awareness and engagement that the strategy has brought about. It has also highlighted some of the particularly notable achievements of the strategy.

It is important that this is not lost in the future but, at the same time, there should be a recognition of the learning that has accrued from the delivery of the strategy and of the changing circumstances in which any future strategy will be delivered (reflecting, for example, the learning from Covid and continued budgetary pressures on the council and other partners).

The recommendations below have been set out with this in mind and are focused on how we suggest the approach to anti-poverty work in Dumfries & Galloway should evolve and develop:

### Recommendations

- Any new approach should articulate a clearer vision that has a stronger outcome focus.
- The relationship between vision, objectives and actions should be clearer.
- Opportunities for stronger engagement with the third sector should be fostered, though this needs to be tightly focused on poverty prevention and reduction.
- There should be a clear emphasis on preventative approaches and for building resilience and capacity in communities.
- A new approach should prioritise reaching the most vulnerable people.
- The extent of additionality should be a clearer factor in resource allocation decisions.
- The process of changing culture within the Council (and partner agencies) should continue, whereby an anti-poverty culture is embedded across the organisations and not seen as the sole or separate responsibility of anti-poverty or equalities staff.
- Measurable indicators of success should be developed and incorporated into a revised monitoring and evaluation framework.
- Overall, we believe that the development of anti-poverty work in the area is at a stage where what has largely been a “council” strategy should evolve into a multi-agency strategy.

