

# Hertfordshire's child and family poverty strategy 2011-20 Revised for 2014-17

## 1. Child and family poverty in Hertfordshire

Hertfordshire is a good place to grow up. The majority of our children and young people thrive and achieve their full potential. 84.9 per cent of young people in Hertfordshire achieve at least five GCSEs (A\*-C) compared to 81.8 per cent nationally<sup>1</sup>.

However, these figures disguise the number of children in Hertfordshire who for many reasons do not achieve their full potential and who face a multitude of barriers in their lives. There is often a misconception that poverty does not exist in Hertfordshire. This strategy aims to set out how organisations will support these families to overcome the barriers they face.

### Key facts<sup>2</sup>

**33,880** (13.2%) children are living in low income families in Hertfordshire.

**27 wards** in Hertfordshire have a level of child poverty equal to or above the UK average of 20.1 per cent.

The highest percentage of child poverty at ward level is **32.6** per cent, compared with the lowest at just **1.2** per cent, showing the huge inequalities within Hertfordshire.

## 2. What does child and family poverty look like in Hertfordshire?

What do we mean by 'child poverty'? We recognise that children are not poor although they might be living in poor households. 'Child poverty' is often used as a shorthand term for child and family poverty and the multitude of complex reasons and experiences these families have. This strategy uses 'child and family poverty' to encompass our holistic approach to supporting families who are living on a low income.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/revised-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-academic-year-2011-to-2012>

<sup>2</sup> The Children in Low-Income Families Local Measure (formerly the Revised Local Child Poverty Measure or National Indicator 116) shows the proportion of children living in families in receipt of out-of-work (means-tested) benefits or in receipt of tax credits where their reported income is less than 60 per cent of UK median income. <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/statistics/child-poverty-stats.htm>

*It's harder to be poor amidst relative affluence – it's okay if the other kids are getting free school meals or wearing second hand clothes or can't invite friends round for tea, but it's not so great if you're one of the few that it is happening to. Your birthday treat is six friends to a happy meal at McDonalds; theirs is a days pony-trekking.*

Professional working in Hertfordshire

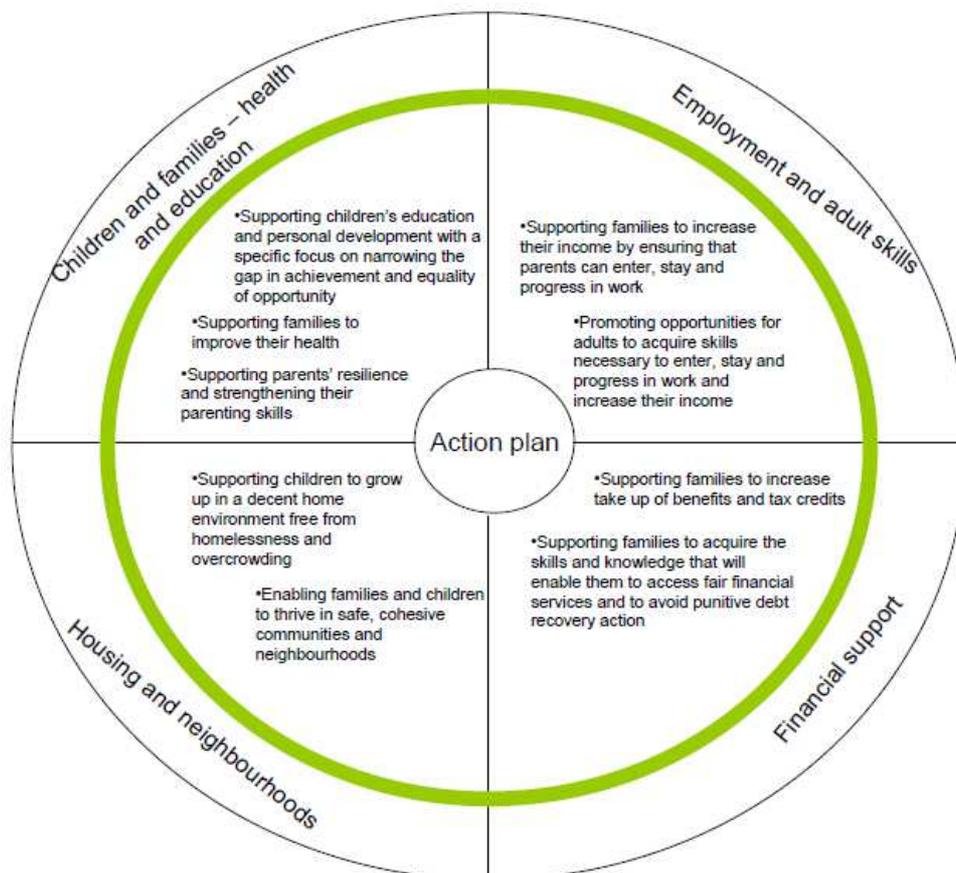
Poverty in Hertfordshire does not look the same as in other areas of the country. Often there are hidden pockets of deprivation within our communities, where individuals and families live alongside more affluent neighbours. This leads to a perception that many of our communities are seen to be comfortable places to live, masking the real needs of families living there.

*Child poverty is hidden in Hertfordshire because people refuse to believe that a leafy urban area with decent housing can contain large pockets of child poverty above the national rate.*

Professional working in Hertfordshire

Organisations in Hertfordshire cite 'stigma' as a real barrier for families who need support. These organisations work alongside families to help them understand that to seek and accept support does not equate to 'failure'.

The diagram below shows the areas, or building blocks, as identified in the first strategy, which gives the foundation for this strategy.



### 3. A strategy for Hertfordshire

The Child Poverty Act 2010 places a duty on local authorities to work in partnership with others to tackle child poverty. There is a duty to prepare and publish a local needs assessment of child poverty in the local area and a strategy setting out how these needs will be addressed.

Organisations in Hertfordshire are committed to working together to tackle child poverty. Within Hertfordshire County Council this work is co-led by Childhood Support Services and Services for Young People. Work with partners is coordinated through the child poverty strategic objectives group, a sub-group of the early intervention and prevention commissioning group. A needs assessment and strategy were published in 2011; this strategy is the second edition, to cover the period 2014-17. This strategy takes into account the following national and local policy documents:

#### *National documents*

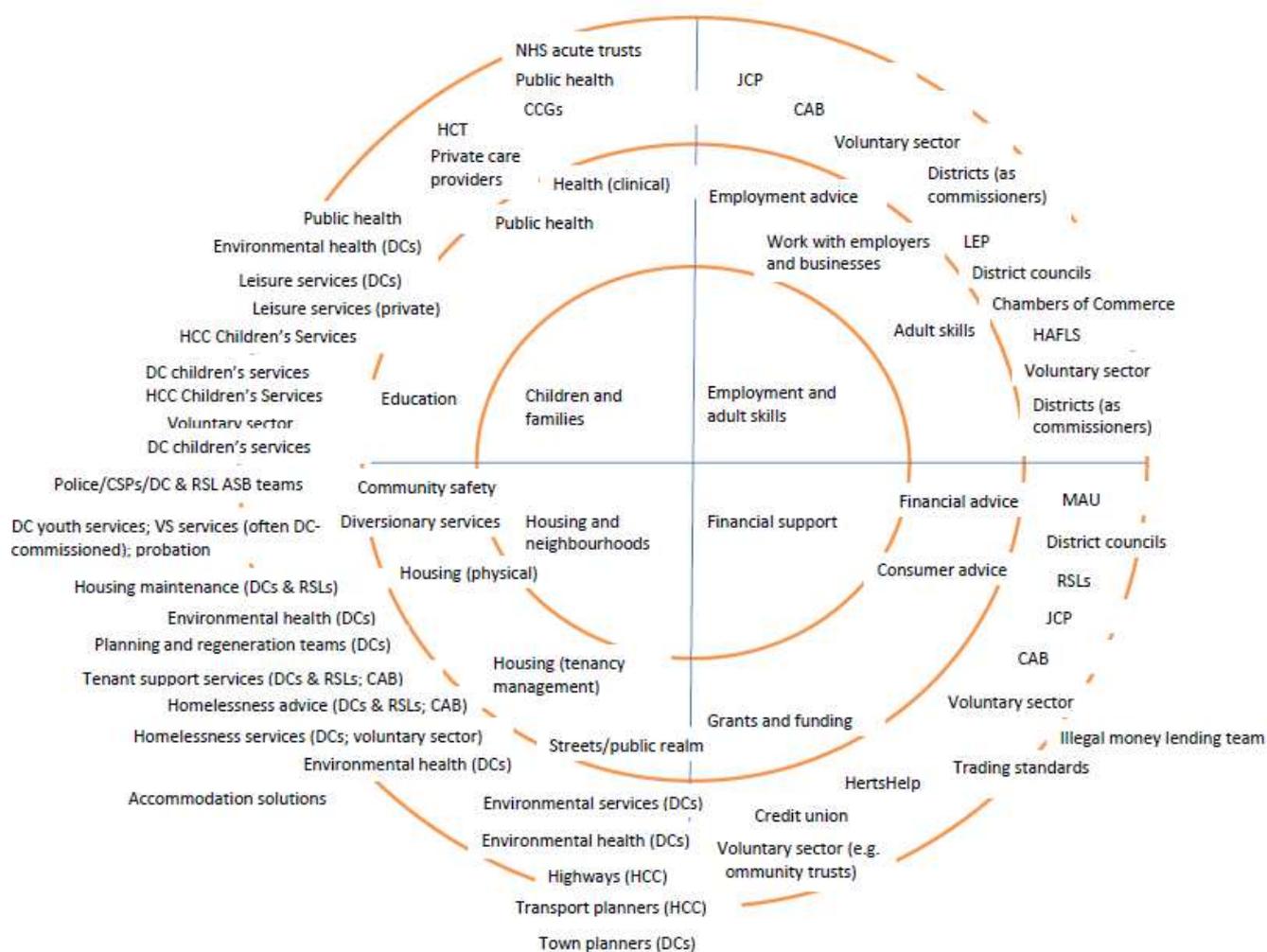
- The national child poverty strategy - *A new approach to child poverty: tackling causes of disadvantage and transforming families' lives*
- *Opening doors, breaking barriers: A strategy for social mobility*
- *Social justice: transforming lives.*
- *What we say we need: a report on the important items, opportunities and aspirations for children and young people*, Amplify and the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

#### *Local documents*

- District council and local strategic partnership strategies
- HCC corporate strategy
- Health and wellbeing strategy
- Healthier Herts: A public health strategy for Hertfordshire
- Early intervention strategy
- Local transport plan and active travel strategy
- Local enterprise partnership plan.

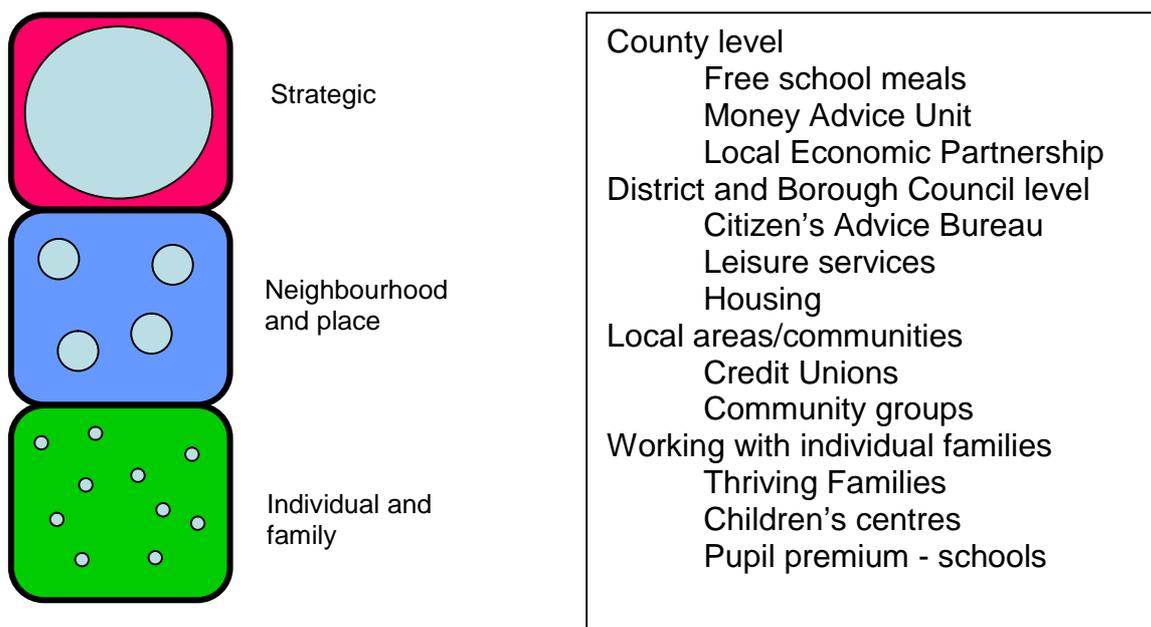
This strategy aims to show the work undertaken by organisations that contributes to reducing or mitigating the effects of living in poverty and to set the direction and priorities for the next three years, within the context of the overarching strategy 2011-20.

Work to address child and family poverty is wide-ranging; it is carried out by many different organisations and services across Hertfordshire. We recognise the importance of the statutory and voluntary sectors working together to share expertise and resources. Work is rarely badged as 'child poverty', but rather works to support families across a range of needs. The diagram below attempts to summarise the range of agencies and services involved in addressing child and family poverty.



Hertfordshire takes a holistic approach to addressing child and family poverty, not just looking to increase household income, although this is a key element. All aspects of family life are considered, based around the building blocks in the diagrams above. We look for the opportunity to add value to this work through partnership working.

Organisations support families in different ways. Some coordinate large scale projects across the whole county, or offer services to all families in Hertfordshire. Others work at a district or neighbourhood level, targeting needs in that particular area. Others work with individual families. The diagram below shows the different levels that organisations and services work at.



#### 4. Needs assessment of child and family poverty

Hertfordshire's needs assessment of child and family poverty is part of a suite of documents that form the joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA). A 'tartan rug' approach has been used to identify the 40 most deprived middle super output areas (MSOA) and to look at the range and severity of issues in each of these areas.

*Document to be included as appendix.*

#### 5. Views of children and young people

Amplify, the Children's Commissioner's advisory group of children and young people, released research showing what is important to children and young people, and what will help them realise their ambitions<sup>3</sup>. The key recommendation of this report is that national and local strategies should include:

- The value children and young people place on family and other positive relationships with friends, carers and professionals;
- Ensure access to good quality and relevant education;
- The prioritisation of health, including mental health provision;
- The value of support and advice services.

This strategy aims to reflect these priorities within our identified actions.

<sup>3</sup> *What we say we need: a report on the important items, opportunities and aspirations for children and young people*; Amplify and the Office of the Children's Commissioner

## 6. Priority areas

The areas below are identified in the first Hertfordshire strategy as the key building blocks for action. For each building block we summarise why this is important, what we are currently doing and what we will do to support families. *A full action plan is included in the appendix (to be included).*

### **Children and families – health and education**

#### **Why is this important?**

Children living in low income households are less likely to achieve well at school than their more affluent peers. Despite progress to narrow the gap in educational achievement, nationally more than half of children from low income families who achieved the expected levels at age seven still fail to go on to achieve five good GCSEs. This compares with over two thirds of children from better off families who achieved expected levels at age seven and went on to do well in their GCSEs at age 16<sup>4</sup>.

Health inequalities exist across our society, meaning that those in more difficult social circumstances experience differences in health, well-being and length of life<sup>5</sup>. It is therefore essential that any strategy to mitigate the effects of living in 'poverty' considers the health of families in our communities.

Links between poverty and health are well documented in Hertfordshire's public health strategy. One of the key priorities is narrowing the gap between the most and least healthy, and within this the aim of improving equity of access to services in most vulnerable and most disadvantaged populations, including people in poverty. The child poverty action group is linked with public health and recognise these shared priorities.

Research from The Children's Society shows that nationally four in every ten disabled children live in poverty (40 per cent), and 14 per cent of disabled children live in severe income poverty (household less than 40 per cent median income)<sup>6</sup>.

#### **What we are doing now**

Organisations in Hertfordshire are delivering a range of services designed to meet the needs of children, young people and families. This includes:

- Supporting smoking cessation
- Healthy child programme
- Supporting families with cooking on a budget
- Health visitors
- Thriving Families

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<sup>4</sup> *Too young to fail: giving all children a fair start in life*, Save the Children, 2013

<sup>5</sup> *Fair society, healthy lives: strategic review of health inequalities in England, post 2010*, Marmot M

<sup>6</sup> *4 in every 10: disabled children living in poverty*, The Children's Society

[http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/4\\_in\\_10\\_reportfinal.pdf](http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/4_in_10_reportfinal.pdf)

- Children's centres
- Grant giving
- Counselling
- Opportunities for free play and social inclusion
- School family work
- Healthy Start programme
- Funded early education for two year olds
- Graded care profile to identify neglect
- Helping people fill in forms
- Schools joining messages between free school meals and foodbanks
- Supporting families to grow their own vegetables
- Sports activities to encourage a healthier lifestyle
- Early brain development and attachment.

### **What we will do**

We will work with schools to identify best practice in how families are supported with issues relating to poverty, and facilitate the sharing of this best practice with other schools in Hertfordshire.

We will ensure financial services are accessible for families with children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).

We will target families eligible for the free two year old early education offer and provide a holistic model of support for these families.

We will promote the take up of free school meals and monitor the implications of the universal offer for children in reception, year 1 and year 2 from September 2014.

We will work alongside the development of the 'My Teen Brain' programme to build understanding between young people and key adults in their lives.

We will promote and deliver specific targeted parenting courses to intervene when relationships have broken down.

### **Employment and adult skills**

#### **Why is this important?**

Child and family poverty is affected by a complex web of employment issues. Hertfordshire has a lower rate of unemployment than England as a whole (2.1 per cent in Hertfordshire compared to 3.1 per cent in England<sup>7</sup>). However, whilst weekly average pay is increasing (0.7 per cent June-August 2013 compared with the same period in 2012), it must be noted that prices are increasing at a much higher rate (2.7 per cent in August 2013 compared with August 2012<sup>8</sup>). The

<sup>7</sup> Hertfordshire monthly unemployment bulletin September 2013

<http://atlas.herts.gov.uk/IAS/profiles/profile?profileId=339&geoTypeId=#iasProfileSection3>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/press/fallingrealwages-oct/>

national minimum wage is now worth £1,000 less in real terms than in was in 2008<sup>9</sup>. This will be having a huge impact on families' ability to pay for the essentials, especially those already living on a low wage.

Adult qualifications in Hertfordshire are good. For all levels of qualification between NVQ1 and NVQ4 equivalent Hertfordshire performs better than the national average. However, there are still 45,000 people of working age with no qualifications<sup>10</sup>, which will be having a huge effect on cycles of achievement and employment. Many parents in Hertfordshire are not confident to support their children with their homework.

There is a call for a focus nationally on those living in in-work poverty, and to look at how work can be made to pay enough, including higher wage levels, better security and increased career progression<sup>11</sup>.

### **What we are doing now**

A range of activity currently takes place to support people gain skills and confidence and to find employment:

- Helping young people access training and employment
- Work experience and paid training
- Courses to support parents gain qualifications and skills to help them find employment
- Facilitating volunteering in schools, leading to training
- Supporting apprenticeships
- Providing financial support for parents of disabled children to help them stay in work
- Job clubs
- Training for children's centre managers
- Programmes run by social housing providers.

### **What we will do**

We will support work to explore barriers to people getting online.

We will work with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to support families experiencing poverty.

We will promote the findings of the family learning enquiry in order to raise awareness of the benefits of family learning.

We will extend the range of courses offered to parents in children's centres and schools to engage parents in learning and support their confidence and work skills.

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<sup>9</sup> State of the nation 2013: social mobility and child poverty in Great Britain, social mobility and child poverty commission

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1967128592/report.aspx?#ls>

<sup>11</sup> See note 8

## **Financial support**

### **Why is this important?**

With the difficulties in employment outlined above and changes to the welfare system currently in progress, it is essential that families are equipped to make informed decisions and to make the most of the money they have. Whether working or not, some families need advice to help them deal with difficult financial situations such as debt or redundancy.

Food has become 30 per cent more expensive and gas 57 per cent between 2007 and 2012<sup>12</sup>. Low income families are affected by a 'poverty premium', where they are unable to take advantage of savings due to lack of internet access and the use of pre-paid meters and affordable credit.

Foodbanks across the country are seeing a huge increase in families who need support. The Trussell Trust saw a 170 per cent increase in people using their foodbanks between 2011-12 and 2012-13; 30 per cent of these visits were due to delays in receiving benefits<sup>13</sup>.

### **What we are doing now**

Organisations offer a range of services to help people who are struggling to manage their money:

- Family finance courses, budgeting courses for families and young people
- Basic maths skills courses
- Debt and financial management advice
- Referrals to Credit Unions
- Practical support and signposting through foodbanks
- Direct financial support, for school uniforms, cookers, fridges
- Supporting households vulnerable to benefit capping
- Financial capability forum for professionals working with families.

### **What we will do**

We will deliver benefits advice to show how people can increase their income, and to make the most of their existing income.

We will engage with district economic development to support work being done to increase employment.

We will support people vulnerable to high cost loans and provide information on alternative sources of support.

## **Housing and neighbourhoods**

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<sup>12</sup> See note 8

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.trusselltrust.org/stats>

## **Why is this important?**

There are links between areas of deprivation and areas of higher crime, meaning that there are increased chances of children living in these areas becoming a victim of, or involved in crime.

Those families living in poverty are more likely to live in more deprived areas, more likely to live in poorer quality housing, which can lead to health implications for families.

## **What we are doing now**

- Mutual exchange list shared through children's centres
- Mutual exchange advice worker
- Support to relocate if someone is experiencing domestic abuse
- Help with housing applications
- Help to argue overcrowding
- Advocacy to help make sure people are in suitable housing
- Referrals to hostels
- Improve and encourage access to foodbanks in areas where stigma is an issue
- Visiting families affected by the 'bedroom tax'
- Make referrals for grants and loans to help with fuel poverty
- Establish foodbanks in new areas
- Link foodbanks with opportunities about job clubs and volunteering.

## **What we will do**

We will explore fuel poverty, the number of families in Hertfordshire vulnerable to fuel poverty, and further develop support mechanisms for these families.

We will engage with foodbanks in Hertfordshire to identify opportunities for support and best practice sharing.

*Include further action from housing strategy group.*

## **Cross-cutting themes**

### **What we are doing now**

- Whole family assessment
- Supporting families to overcome barriers
- Supporting families to make changes
- Working with volunteers and those that can have empathy
- Sharing best practice
- Family support workers
- Confidence building and mentoring for young people.

## What we will do

We will develop methods of communication to ensure families and professionals can access the information they need.

We will raise awareness of the experience of families in poverty in Hertfordshire.

### 7. Monitoring and review

This strategy has been produced by the Hertfordshire child poverty strategic objectives group and is the 2014-17 element of the Hertfordshire child poverty strategy 2012-20. The associated actions will be monitored on a quarterly basis by this group and will be updated annually. Quarterly progress reports will be monitored by the early intervention and prevention sub-group of the children and young people's strategic commissioning group, coordinated by Hertfordshire County Council.

The following key indicators will be used to track progress, as agreed by the early intervention and prevention commissioning group.

Number of two year olds accessing free early education
Percentage of children living in low-income households (previously the revised child poverty measure)
Attainment gap at foundation stage
Attainment gap at key stage 2
Attainment gap at key stage 4
Percentage of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)