

Wokingham Borough Anti-Poverty Strategy 2022-26

1. Introduction

Wokingham Borough has consistently been one of the least deprived unitary authority areas in England¹ but we've seen an increase in people and families on low incomes as well as those facing employment and financial insecurity for the first time because of the pandemic. It's fair to say that while we have all faced the same Covid storm these past 20 months, we have not necessarily all been in the same boat, and we want to address this.

Since the start of the year, we have been working closely with residents, partners in the voluntary sector and council colleagues to understand more about the inequalities that exist in the borough. We have used this information to build on the support we already offer and to create our Anti-Poverty Strategy to tackle the issues so we can ensure fairer and more equal opportunities for all. This isn't about quick fixes. It's about long-term changes that will make a real difference to our residents. We are continuing to gather knowledge and information to inform the annual action plans that sit beneath and support delivery of our overall strategy.

In doing this and by working with our partners, we will seek to empower our residents who are living through difficult times and look to providing them with greater choice and also safeguarding their dignity.

Poverty has existed for generations in society but has now increased through Covid with more people experiencing poverty, and many of those that were previously in poverty being pushed into or further into debt. Our partners across the voluntary and community sector are doing an excellent job to support those most in need and their efforts are appreciated by the council and across the wider community. Through this strategy we want to continue the work that the council has been doing along with our voluntary sector partners in providing support to our residents: to support this, we have created a Hardship Alliance with four leaders from our voluntary and community sector. This strategy will be delivered with the sector. We are also eager to ensure the provision of support at the earliest opportunity, preventing people falling into or further into poverty and a downward spiral of events impacting on their health and wellbeing.

Wokingham Borough Council

Cllr John Halsall, Leader of the Council

Cllr Laura Blumenthal, Deputy Member for Anti-Poverty

Graham Ebers, Deputy CEO of the Council

Hardship Alliance

Fiona Price, Age UK

Emma Cantrell, First Days

Amy Garstang, Wokingham United Charities

Jake Morrison, Citizens Advice

¹ Ranking least deprived in 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation.

2. Purpose of the Strategy

The Anti-Poverty Strategy is designed to support those in poverty and help them to address the challenges in order that they are better placed to meet their own needs and aspirations for the future. It aims, through working in partnership, to promote an early intervention approach as part of the Council's role to 'prevent' poverty. This will achieve better results for those in, or at risk of falling into, poverty, rather than trying to resolve matters at a later stage when the solution is more complex. The strategy will help work towards the community vision for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business², ensuring that everyone is included in the council's thinking and, where needed, supporting people to be better able to enjoy this aspiration.

The aim of the Anti-Poverty Strategy is to provide equality of opportunity through lessening the effects of poverty, enabling people to overcome the barriers linked to poverty and preventing further people falling into poverty. It recognises that this is a longer-term aspiration and in the life span of this 5-year strategy the intention is to:

- Lessen the short-term effects of poverty
- Prevent further people falling into poverty
- Better support our residents who are living in poverty
- Enable residents to better address the barriers to overcoming poverty

3. What is Poverty?

Everyone has their own personal idea of what is meant by poverty as there is no one specific definition. For consistency, the following definition is proposed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) as it refers to more than just income.

When referring to poverty, the most obvious element is income – but it can also include a lack of ability to source goods or access to essential services.

When a person's resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation)

Covid made clear the vital role that many people on lower incomes play within society, whether they are working in shops, providing care to others, or any of the range of other key roles: this strategy will help recognise and address the challenges faced by these people, living in a wealthy and higher-cost area such as Wokingham.

Poverty is not just about unemployment or low income and can often be linked to reduced cashflow or shortfalls resulting in people being unable to meet their immediate outgoings, which could be as a result of spiraling costs due to reasons out of their control. For many, poverty in Wokingham is particularly highlighted because households affected are surrounded by areas of affluence.

There are many definitions for poverty (see Appendix 3) and these can be calculated either before or after housing costs. Clearly, in an area such as Wokingham Borough, with high value and high-cost properties, housing costs present an added challenge. For the purpose of this strategy, the ambition is to address poverty after these housing costs are factored in.

² Wokingham Borough Community Vision 2020 to 2024.

4. National and Local Context

Around 1 in 5 people in the UK lived in poverty (2018/2019): that represents 14.5 million people living in poverty, which was before the impact of Covid-19. This is broken down into 8.2m working-age adults, 4.2m children and 1.9m pension-age adults³. Of these in poverty, over half are more than 50% below the poverty line and this proportion had not changed since the millennium through to the pandemic – the full impact of which is yet to be understood.

Data & Analysis

There are a number of key datasets at a national and local level which are useful in understanding the extent of poverty and the groups affected. Some of the key data to support this strategy follows. Work will continue to baseline more data at a local level to further understand the depth of poverty, groups affected and progress made over the life of the strategy.

The datasets used to inform this strategy are:

- Indices of Deprivation 2019, including the Index of Multiple Deprivation
- Unemployment figures
- Child poverty
- Free School Meals
- Mental Health
- Homelessness and Housing

In developing this strategy, these datasets held nationally, along with locally held information have been analysed to understand the local context and the challenges faced within Wokingham Borough. Full details of the data used is contained within Appendix 2, whilst an analysis of the main points taken from this is summarised here.

Data Summary

Wokingham Borough is overall, a very affluent area placed within the bottom (least deprived) 10% on the Indices of Deprivation, but when drilling down to a much more local level and looking at the Index of Multiple Deprivation, there are some areas⁴ which are much more deprived than the overall borough picture. Even these areas perform well compared to the most deprived communities nationally, but this again masks the challenges faced by some households in these areas and more widely across the Borough. It should be noted that this most recent data is from 2019 and therefore before the full impacts of Covid were incorporated.

Looking at some of the underlying data aspects, it is clear that the employment picture is similar with Wokingham Borough overall performing better than the country as a whole. There was a spike in Universal Credit claimant rates during the peak of the pandemic, but this quickly reverted towards, but remaining higher than, the pre-pandemic position. Within this general picture those on lower incomes have fared worse and there has also been a significant impact on younger age groups. This is seen through more younger people, including graduates, either under-employed, or holding part-time rather than full-time jobs.

With the Borough having a higher rate of people employed in professional and managerial roles than either the South East or England average, there is greater resilience within the borough as a whole to bounce back.

³ UK Poverty 2020/21: Annual Report – Joseph Rowntree Foundation

⁴ These are Lower Layer Super Output Areas which are areas of around 625 households or a population of around 1,500 (the boundary of which does not change to enable comparison): Office for National Statistics.

This disguises the underlying challenges faced by those who have lost their jobs and are leading to the doubling of people in receipt of Universal Credit.

The impact on families has been significant, nationally and locally, with almost one third of children nationally living in poverty: in Wokingham Borough the rate is significantly lower with under 8% in relative poverty. Alongside this, looking at the increase in Free School Meals provides a strong local measure for children in families in poverty. Since the pandemic there has been an increase of 479 children receiving Free School Meals, which is an increase of around one quarter from the pre-Covid levels: this is proportionately a higher increase than nationally. In part this increase reflects the strong position of the Borough pre-Covid, but also highlights the different impacts of the pandemic felt by a large number of families within the borough. It is hoped that this number will continue to increase in the short term as more people are encouraged to sign up and therefore access the support they are entitled to.,

Mental health concerns have increased for all communities during the pandemic, but there is an increased impact on those who are least well off. This is particularly linked to anxiety and depression, which is heightened for those experiencing job insecurity. Overall, the levels of people with mental health concerns are comparable with the South East.

Case Study

People moving into new social housing receive their house with no carpets, washing machine, cooker or microwave. They also may not have any of the smaller electrical items required for day-to-day living such as a kettle. The **Make A House A Home** project supports people who can't afford it by providing carpeting and these white goods required to live in the home they have just received: this is essential for day to day living, avoids the health benefits of people "getting by" without carpeting and therefore suffering from the dust rising through floor boards. Through providing these essential items, families are able to start living and settle into their new home without the stress of then having to trawl around charity shops or spend over £1,000 in making their house fit to live in.

5. Understanding the Borough

To enable a focus on this complex and challenging subject and to ensure residents in the most need are targeted and gain the best results possible, a resident segmentation approach was developed. This has identified three groups of residents that are to be the focus of this strategy.

Persistent Hardship

These people are on low incomes claiming universal credit or other benefits and are the focus of most of the existing government support.

Just About Managing

These are people who were just getting by on their own means without qualifying for support, although frequently they have little or no money left at the end of the month; there is no financial resilience.

Asset Rich, Cash Poor

These are people who own their own home with limited savings and their financial assets are not easily accessible.

6. The Approach

To deliver on the aims of mitigating short-term effects of poverty and enabling residents to better overcome the barriers to address poverty and to focus activity on the 3 resident groups identified a focused approach has been developed.

This approach entails challenging stigma through working in partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and residents to combat the stigma of poverty, to enable access for all to the services and support available, whilst adopting a people-focused approach where the council works with VCS partners to better understand the experiences of residents who are living in poverty, enabling development of the workforce and a continued commitment to learn and grow.

Early intervention and prevention is at the heart of the strategy, so those in poverty can get support as soon as possible, whilst actions are taken to prevent others falling into poverty, or their position worsening. The partnership will continue to enable innovative solutions: develop innovative, sustainable, cross-Council and partner initiatives that can actively support those experiencing both long and short-term poverty impacts. The strategy will be the catalyst that connects other Council strategies, projects and plans, supports partnership working to ensure a whole community approach to tackling poverty that will have a positive impact on residents.

To support people in the best way possible, the council proposes to take a **No Wrong Door** approach, through which anyone seeking support via one of the avenues available can be signposted and introduced to the best place to receive the support they need. This recognises that asking for support is not easy and once someone has overcome this barrier, they shouldn't need to go through the same process again. The *No Wrong Door* approach will ensure that when someone has taken the step of asking for support, they aren't turned away and are guided through the support network, without the need to keep on approaching other organisations, or retelling their story. Through effective partnership working between the council, town and parish councils and the voluntary and community sector, coupled with introductions to other agencies the council and partners can work most effectively together. This will simplify access to receiving support for those that have taken the first step by asking for help.

Through this approach to focus activity, the three objectives of the Anti-Poverty Strategy will be delivered across the partnership.

The Three Objectives

These objectives form the basis of the partnership approach to addressing poverty within the borough. They set out how the council and partners can collectively work together to enable delivery against the priorities set to focus the anti-poverty work.	
Objective 1	Support people in poverty
Objective 2	Strengthen communities in their resilience to poverty
Objective 3	Improve life opportunities for residents who are living in poverty



7. Wokingham's Strategic Context

Within the Borough, this Anti-Poverty Strategy fits within a wider framework that sets out the Council's key priorities and delivery mechanisms across the borough. The main strategies that the Anti-Poverty Strategy aligns with, and this strategy's contribution is summarised here.

Council Corporate Delivery Plan

In February 2020, the Council set out a vision of Wokingham Borough as "A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business". This vision is underpinned by five strategic priorities:

- Safe, Strong Communities
- Enriching Lives
- Right Homes, Right Place
- Keeping the Borough Moving
- A Clean Green Borough

These are underpinned by two inward-focused priorities, or enablers:

- Changing the Way We Work for You
- Be the Best We Can Be

This strategy is fundamental in delivering the vision for the Borough and has strong links with the first three of our priorities, whilst driving a change in the way the council works for and with our residents.

Health & Wellbeing Strategy

There is a close link between poverty and poor health outcomes: poverty can be a cause or consequence of poor quality of life. A person's wellbeing is directly affected by their mental and physical health. Tackling the barriers faced by those on low incomes through increasing the promotion of healthy lifestyle choices and exercise, such as by accessible cycling schemes, will increase quality of life.

The Health & Wellbeing Strategy sets out three priorities:

- Cardiovascular Disease
- Cancer
- Covid recovery

There is an integrated approach to deliver these aspects of the strategy with health partners taking a lead, but addressing poverty is fundamental to delivery of all three of these priorities as a way of enhancing wellbeing.

Other Strategies

There are several other strategies that the Anti-Poverty Strategy aligns with. The key ones of these are:

- Recovery Strategy
- Equality & Diversity Strategy
- Voluntary & Community Sector Strategy
- Domestic Abuse Strategy

8. Developing the Action Plan

This strategy will be underpinned by annual action plans developed each year to address the immediate impacts felt by residents and work to move more people out of poverty. This partnership-developed approach and action plan requires working closely with and relying on the support of the strong voluntary and community sector within the Borough.

The strategy presents short-term actions such as communications, signposting and removing barriers, building on the one front door successes to lead into a *No Wrong Door* approach, providing a short-term response whilst progressing through to longer-term actions working with residents using a personalised approach to address the root causes of their poverty.

The action plan will be delivered over a five-year period and refreshed each year to ensure that it remains relevant, builds on actions from the previous years and is able to develop innovative and personalised solutions to addressing challenges faced by people within the Borough.

9. Delivering & Funding the Strategy

The council provided a temporary Anti-Poverty Officer for up to one year to support development of the strategy and accompanying action plan, as well as developing networks within the council and VCS as key delivery partners. To have a successful delivery of the Anti-Poverty Strategy this will require a community-led response that includes working in partnership across the council departments, with the VCS and the town and parish councils.

In addition to this staffing capacity, the Council is looking to provide initial funding to support delivery of the strategy: this is on top of money received from the Government to support initiatives such as the Holiday Activity Fund and the Covid Local Support Grant which provided funding for meals to support school children on free school meals through the holidays. These funding streams from the government have provided £1.2m for Wokingham Borough to directly support those most in need.

To deliver the strategy, it is important that grant funding can be attracted to support VCS partners in continuing the work they do to support local communities: the Council will work with the VCS to support these funding bids. This leveraging of local and national grants to support the anti-poverty ambitions will be in conjunction with a medium-term investment of council resources.

10. Measuring Success

The strategy is supported by an action plan, which will be reviewed each year to ensure that actions are delivered, develop the next year's actions and ensure that the strategy with accompanying measures remains relevant. These actions will contribute towards the ambition of lessening the short-term effects of poverty and enabling people to overcome the barriers linked to poverty. The published strategy will include a basket of key performance measures.

Progress towards this ambition will be difficult to gauge in the short-term, so there will be a poverty scorecard to sit alongside the strategy, looking at some of the shorter-term measures which will enable progress to be measured. In the short-term it is intended that some measures demonstrate increased demand, which gives the council and partners more visibility of the scale of poverty within the borough and identifies the people or families who may require support. Accessing this support will help these people in the longer-term to move out of poverty, leading to an improvement in the scorecard and contribution towards the ambition.

An annual update on delivery of the strategy will be published alongside the next year's action plan.

Appendix 1 - High Level Action Plan

This high-level action plan will set out some of the key actions to be taken by the council and partners to support delivery of the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Through further engagement with services and voluntary sector partners, the establishment of workstream leads and identification of current actions from other strategies and initiatives this will be populated to identify key actions for the life of the strategy.

The Action Plan for Year 1 is below, which will be built on in subsequent years to take forward existing actions, address challenges faced and pick up emerging opportunities.

Objective 1 Support People in Poverty		Timescale		
Theme	Year 1	Q1	Q2-3	Q4
Target communication, advice and guidance to ensure residents are supported and signposted to the right support available to ensure their immediate needs are met	1. Embed dedicated learning for all resident access points on how and where to signpost residents who are experiencing poverty.			
	2. Development & promotion of the Local Support Hub to better enable residents to access support and advice as they need it.			
	3. Review of all "debt" related communications to ensure the language, tone and content is signposting those that need support to the right place, at the right time in the right way.			
	4. Develop a targeted communications campaign to promote take-up of support and advice that is available across the borough e.g. Free School Meals / Healthy Start Initiative / Mental & Physical Health services.			
	5. Implement text messaging service for key teams across the council to provide key messages to residents via their mobiles: increasing access and impact.			
Work with the VCS to provide debt advice & support people to tackle their debt and to develop budgeting skills	1. Invest in a dedicated Debt Advice worker within the VCS to enable people to deal with their debt and claim support they are entitled to.			
	2. Improve training and support to help people develop budgeting skills to avoid increasing debt in the future.			
	3. Establish mechanisms for signposting and cross-referral between the VCS, Town / Parish Councils and the Debt Advice Worker to provide the support people require.			
Develop a <i>No Wrong Door</i> initiative that ensures residents can choose how they seek support, through enhanced partnership working with the VCS groups, Town & Parishes & Council services	1. Continue support for the One Front Door initiative that helps VCS partners support people in poverty with advice and access to services.			
	2. Promote Community Navigators self-referral opportunities and embed this within working practices.			
	3. Determine how the No Wrong Door will work, as a successor to the ongoing activity driven through the VCS One Front Door, and attract funding to support the continuation of this support.			



Objective 2 Strengthen Communities in their Resilience to Poverty		Timescale		
Theme	Year 1	Q1	Q2-3	Q4
Provide support to people most in need, enabling them to understand and overcome their debt	1. Develop the Community Support model, working with residents to break down the fear associated with debt and provide coaching to overcome challenges and empower them.			
	2. Provide joined-up support or early intervention within the VCS and clear links into the council to reduce evictions and prevent homelessness.			
	3. Work with Berkshire Credit Union, the VCS and debt advisors to promote saving and sustainable borrowing.			
Enhance opportunities to work with residents who are digitally excluded to open up new ways of engaging and accessing support	1. Continue and expand the digital donations project, targeting those most in need and supported by a roll-out of the digital champion's scheme.			
	2. Work in partnerships with schools and VCS groups to improve the digital access for young people across the borough, supporting all children to continue to learn from home.			
	3. Extend digital skills programmes available (including those offered by adult and community learning team and VCS partners).			
Establish a range of job and training opportunities for those looking to enter employment or improve their earning potential	1. Establish an outreach model for additional employment support covering all age-groups and utilising local venues to reach out into communities.			
	2. Provide accessible careers guidance and support for all residents who wish to return to work: linking in with local business to address employment gaps.			
	3. Review procurement social value requirements to increase emphasis on provision of paid work / apprenticeship opportunities within the borough, including for people who are disadvantaged or vulnerable.			

Objective 3 Improve Life Opportunities for Residents who are living in Poverty		Timescale		
Theme	Year 1	Q1	Q2-3	Q4
Make social and temporary housing accessible for those that need it and improve affordability of running costs	1. Develop the Make a House a Home scheme which supports residents who move into Local Authority Housing, Social Housing & temporary accommodation to have their homes equipped to live in.			
	2. Undertake a stock condition survey of the whole council housing stock to develop an energy benchmark.			
	3. Continue to deliver the "Warmer Winter" project with First Days and Share.			
	4. Promote installation of and support available for LED lighting, cavity wall, loft insulation, boiler controls and other ways to make the property consume less energy and to reduce energy bills.			

Ensure the Equality Impact Assessments are widened to include Poverty, so that Council decisions are viewed through a hardship lens meaning real life impacts are understood	1. Add poverty / socio-economic factors as a consideration to be used within all Equality Impact Assessments.			
	2. Update project documentation requirements to place the needs of low-income households and those facing poverty at the heart of decision making.			
	3. Review council fees and charging policies, to better consider the impact on low-income households of any changes to fees or charges.			
Recognise the links between poverty and mental health to improve services that provide support & ensure that the needs of residents are understood and responded to	1. Increase health promotion of lifestyle choices around nutrition, healthy eating and exercise that support people on low incomes.			
	2. Review opportunities for making the sports, arts and cultural offer more accessible to those on lower incomes within the borough.			
	3. Promote the mental and physical health benefits of walking, cycling, green spaces, Wokingham Bikathon, Cycle Hubs as affordable ways of getting exercise.			

Appendix 2 – Data for the Strategy

Key Datasets

A number of key datasets were used in developing this strategy, drawing data together from both national and local sources. The data from these and key points for each is summarised below. The timing for the data varies, with some not yet being available to fully understand the impact of Covid.

The one additional dataset which is missing is that from the Census since this data is so far out of date to make it meaningless and the newest data will not be available for several months. When the 2021 Census data becomes available, this will feed into the next annual review of the strategy.

Indices of Deprivation 2019

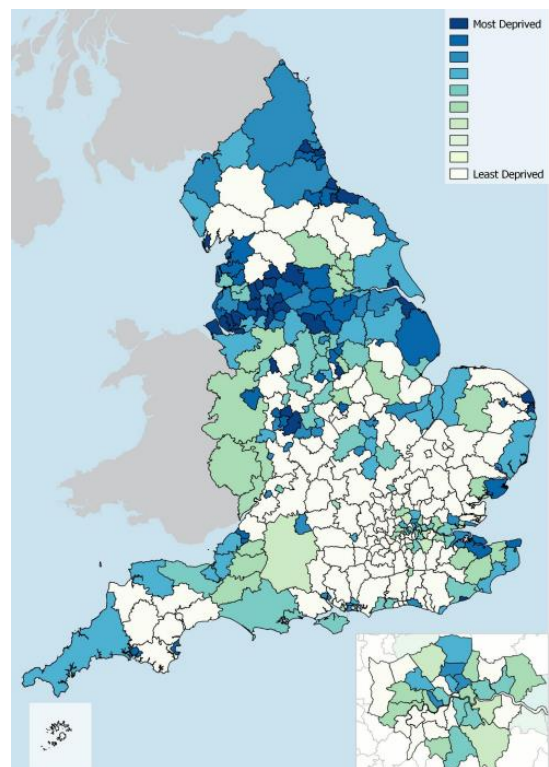
The Indices of Deprivation are a unique measure of relative deprivation at a small local area level (Lower-layer Super Output Areas) which represent a small part of a ward: often being only a few streets. Data on these has been produced by Office for National Statistics since 2000. The Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD 2019) is the most recent release. The Indices provide a set of relative measures of deprivation for small areas across England, based on seven different domains, or facets, of deprivation:

- Income Deprivation
- Employment Deprivation
- Education, Skills and Training Deprivation
- Health Deprivation and Disability
- Crime
- Barriers to Housing and Services
- Living Environment Deprivation

At the national level, the index paints a useful picture of the distribution of poverty across England. The map⁵ shows a picture, at a given point in time, of the levels of deprivation experienced in each local authority across England.

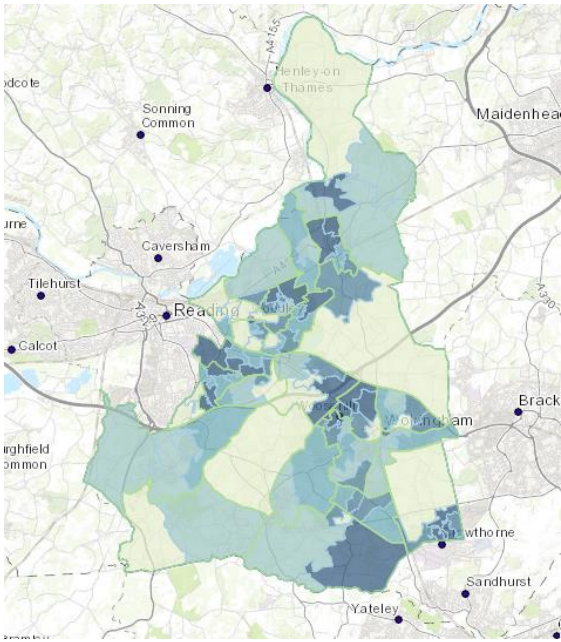
The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) also allows us to look at a more local level. The below map shows the relative levels of deprivation across the Borough. As at the national level, locally we can see pockets of more deprived areas and we can identify our 5 most deprived wards as:

- Wokingham Without
- Norreys
- Loddon
- Finchamstead South
- Bulmershe and Whitegates



The map also clearly shows that whilst there are pockets of deprivation, deprivation isn't restricted to these areas and show whilst local targeted solutions are important, they must be supported with more wide-reaching approaches to ensure everyone has the support they need.

⁵ Office for National Statistics: Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 – Distribution by local authority based on proportion of neighbourhoods in the most deprived decile nationally.



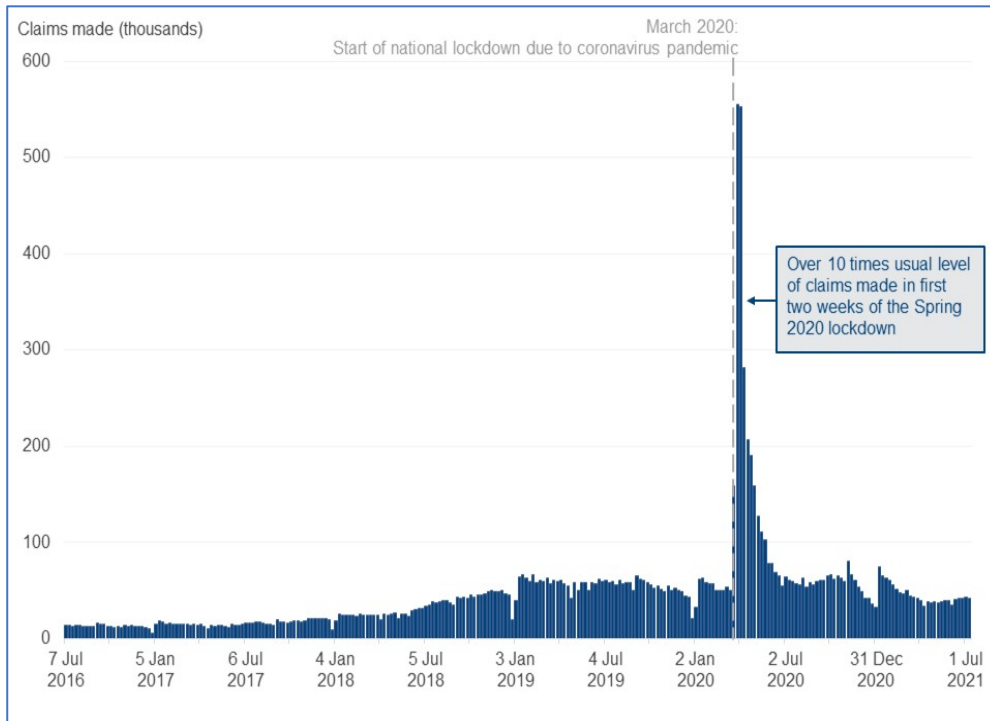
LSOA

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)
Rank|2019



Unemployment & Low Income

As the latest UK figures for number of claims for Universal Credit show, unemployment has been a big challenge over the lockdown period, despite furlough. However, it is worth noting that the number of claimants continues to fall following the removal of Covid restrictions.

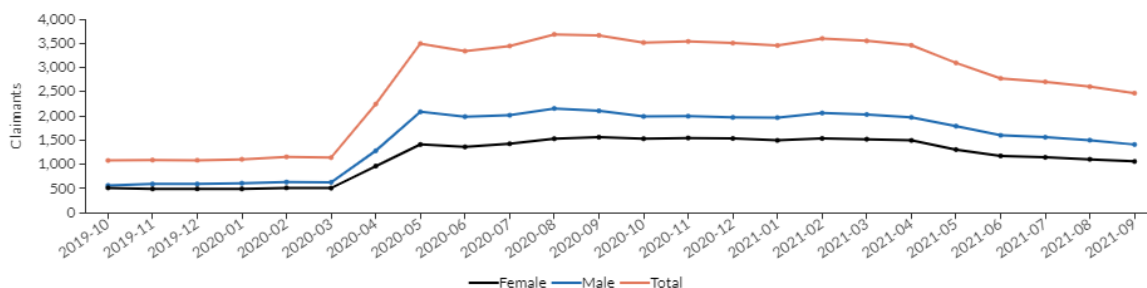


Universal Credit Claims made Weekly 7 July 2016 to 8 July 2021

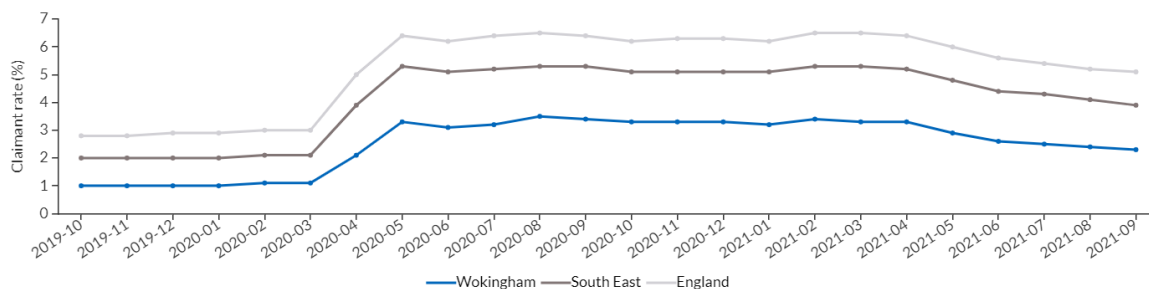
⁶ Indices of multiple deprivation 2019 by LSOA taken from the Berkshire Public Health’s data observatory.

Poverty significantly impacts on those who are not working. In 2018/19, 51% of working-age adults in workless families were in poverty, compared with 15% of those in working families.

The below graph⁷ shows the claim count of universal credit since October 2019 to September 2021 for the Borough in total and split by gender. We see a similar uptick in the level of universal credit and job seekers allowance claims, with a slow but gradual decline in levels from a peak around February.



Placing those levels into context the below graph shows the claim rates for Wokingham Borough, the South East and England as a percentage of the population of each area.



Whilst this graph suggests the situation in the Borough is much better than in the country more widely the total figures are still significant. Claimant rates in the borough peaked at 3,685 residents in August 2020 reducing to 2,815 in June 2021 (a reduction of almost 24%). CAB Wokingham data supports this, showing that Universal Credit and Tax Credits were the most popular queries with 2,029 people seeking support in this area in FY19/20⁸. Claimant numbers in September 2021 came to 2,470 claims in total for all persons aged 16+ (a reduction since the peak of over 33%). This is made up of 1,410 males and 1,060 females. Pre-pandemic claimant levels hovered around 1,000 people. The current trend continues to show reducing claimant numbers though uncertainty regarding the full impact of furlough ending remains.

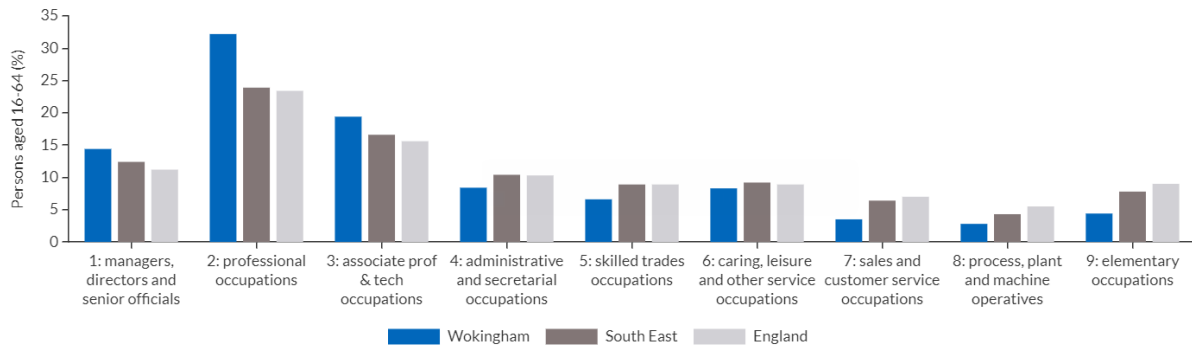
At the end of August 2021 there were 68 (1.8%) young people aged 16-18 who were unemployed in the borough, compared to 46 (1.1%) in 2019 before the pandemic and the same as this time last year. As a further challenge, young people who are leaving the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) group are tending to go into part time employment or jobs with no training and the number of young people who have been NEET for 6 months or longer is increasing.

The economy has recovered beyond expectation at the national level. Locally our jobs market is skewed towards high skilled professional, managerial and technical occupations⁹. Whilst this means a high level of average earnings and prosperity because those roles are well paid, the absence of entry level and more vocational level jobs may prove a blocker to accessing employment for more long term unemployed or for young people with lower educational outcomes.

⁷ Universal Credit and Job Seekers Allowance claimants - for persons aged 16 and over in Wokingham by month. Data from the ONS via the Berkshire data observatory

⁸ CAB Wokingham – Key Statistics Overview – FY20/21

⁹ Occupation type from the ONS Annual Population Survey 2021.



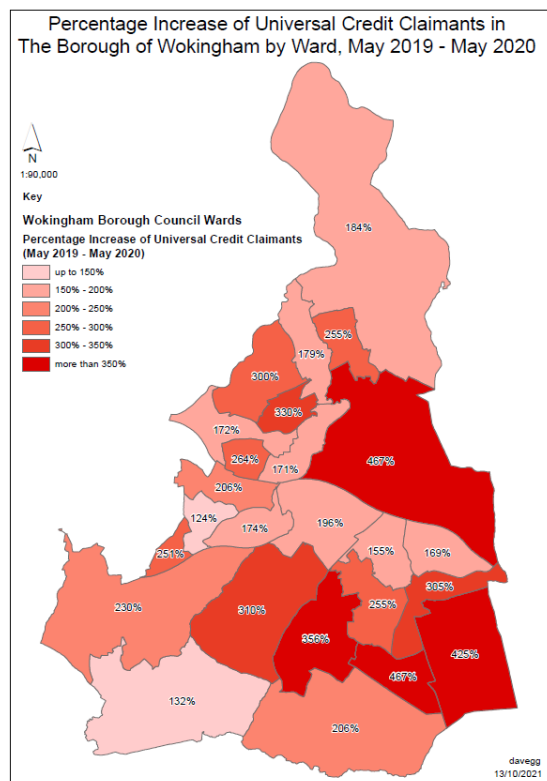
Some of these opportunities may, however, be available in the wider Berkshire employment market. The same data for Reading and Bracknell Forest shows that they have 7.3% and 8.1% of jobs in elementary occupations compared to just 4.4% for Wokingham Borough. Whilst some areas of mass employment are near our areas in most need this does not always mean they are easily accessible. A trip from Wokingham Without to Doncastle Road in Bracknell’s Western Industrial area is only a few miles and 10 minutes in the car. Using a combination of foot and public transport however it can take close to an hour. Enabling routes into employment, be it skills development, economic development in the borough or providing communication routes that allow residents access to jobs outside the borough is an important aspect to improving employment and earning potential for residents: particularly those living in more deprived areas.

Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows that for people to stand still financially they need to see annual pay increases of around 7%¹⁰. This is not realistic for most people, which is likely to see more people becoming less financially secure and some of these starting to lead to an increase in Universal Credit claimants from in-work but low-pay households.

Child Poverty

Nationally, child poverty has increased significantly, particularly since the pandemic. There were 4.3 million children living in poverty in the UK in 2019 /20.¹¹ This is 31% of children, or 9 in a classroom of 30. Children from Black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to be in poverty with 46% now in poverty, compared with 26% of children in White British families.

Locally, ONS data from the Department of Work and Pensions in 2019 shows that 6.8% of families in Wokingham Borough are in absolute poverty and 7.7% in relative poverty. This is a much better position than the national and regional figures. Nationally, 15.3% of families are in absolute poverty and 18.4% in relative poverty. This percentage comparison masks the actual number of people involved. In 2019 in Wokingham Borough 2,407 families were in absolute poverty and 2,741 families in relative poverty¹².



¹⁰ Institute of Fiscal Studies: Analysis of Government Fiscal Events 2021.

¹¹ Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs Report’ 2019/20.

¹² Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs, 2019/20.

Free School Meals

Nationally, the number of free school meal pupils¹³ (FSM) has risen from 1.44m in January 2020 to 1.63m in October 2020. This represents 19.7% of children being eligible for free school meals in October 2020, up from 17.3% in January 2020.

Although the number of children eligible from FSM in the Borough is considerably lower than the national average (8.5% as at May 2021), this is 2,421 young people. This represents an increase of 479 young people from January 2020 through to May 2021. Whilst some of this increase can be accounted for by an overall growth in school pupils, the percentage of those receiving free school meals has increased by almost 25% (likely to be in line with national growth, which showed an increase of 13% to October 2020, although Wokingham Borough started from a lower significantly level).

In Wokingham Borough in 2019, only 28% of children receiving Free School Meals obtained English and Maths GCSE at grade 5 or above, lower than the national average, compared to 58% of children who do not receive Free School Meals¹⁴. Poverty is having a huge impact on the future of these children.

Mental Health

The impact of poor mental health affects every part of our community and this has been magnified by the effects of Covid. Those who have never experienced mental illness find themselves grappling with anxiety, depression and loneliness for the first time.

There is a causal link between poverty and mental health¹⁵, with the 20% least well-off people in the UK being two to three times more likely to develop mental ill health than the richest 20% of the population. In trying to further understand the impact of Covid on mental health, 58% of survey¹⁶ participants living in a household receiving benefits were regarded as currently having poor or very poor mental health.

In 2019 Wokingham Borough had a rate of 1,991 per 100,000 people living with all mental health disorders. This is above the average rate in South East England of 1,971 per 100,000¹⁷ and indicates that all types of mental health impact our population. Further, 15% of the Borough's residents had a formal diagnosis of depression in 2019 with more than 40% of GP consultations relating in some way to mental health issues.

The recently launched Wokingham Wellbeing Service (supporting people referred by GP living with mental health issues) has received 50 referrals between April-June 2021 rising to 112 referrals between July-September 2021, demonstrating the underlying need in our community.

Homelessness

Wokingham Borough has one of the lowest levels of Homelessness in the South East, as shown in Graph 1. Covid has impacted on this situation with around 1 in every 1,000 households in the Borough declared homeless, reaching a peak of 1.17 per 1,000 in April-July 2020, demonstrated in Graph 2. This represents around 100 households in the borough being declared homeless.

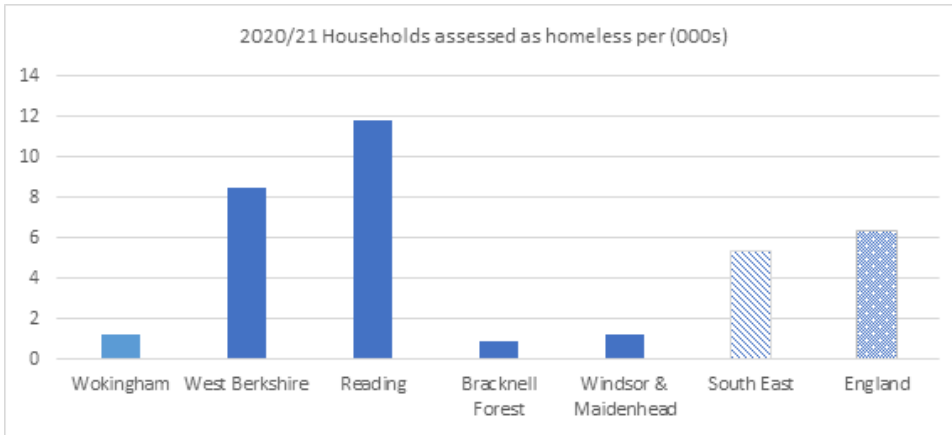
¹³ Autumn Term 2020/21 - Free school meals: Autumn term. gov.uk

¹⁴ First Days – Annual Report 2020/21

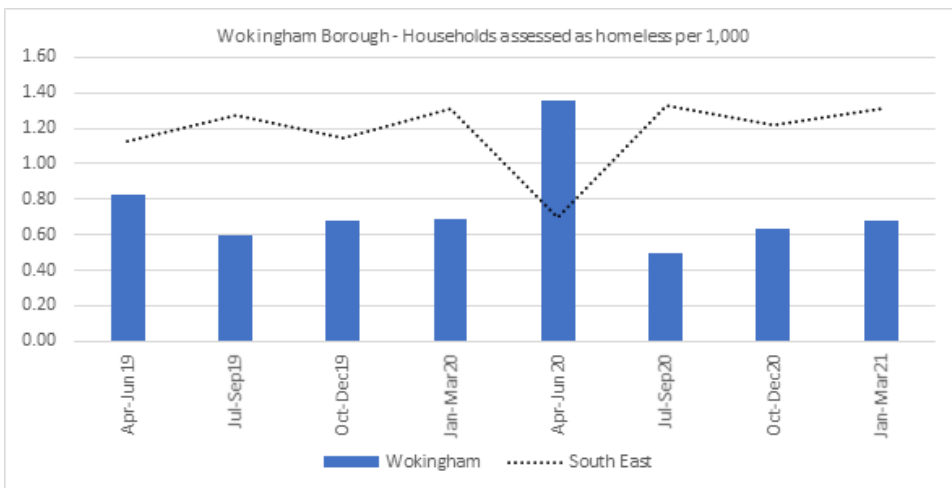
¹⁵ The Mental Health Foundation.

¹⁶ MIND - The Consequences of Coronavirus for Mental Health

¹⁷ Mental Health Disease Burden – The Global Burden of Disease project



Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities



Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

There are around 45 to 50 people in temporary accommodation at a given point in time and an average of around 5 people rough sleeping each month. 45% of those approaching the council are successfully prevented from becoming homeless.

Fuel Poverty

Data for this is old and taken from a snapshot produced by the Office for National Statistics in 2018 but does not form part of their regular data collection programme. It shows that at that time 4,046 households were in fuel poverty. This represents 7.1% of households in the borough, comparing favourably to a national average of 11.4%. Clearly this is likely to have changed a lot when the impact of Covid is able to be captured.

Appendix 3 – Definitions of Poverty

This strategy draws on the work of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in understanding, defining and measuring poverty: recognising that poverty is a complex problem that needs a range of measures each telling different things.

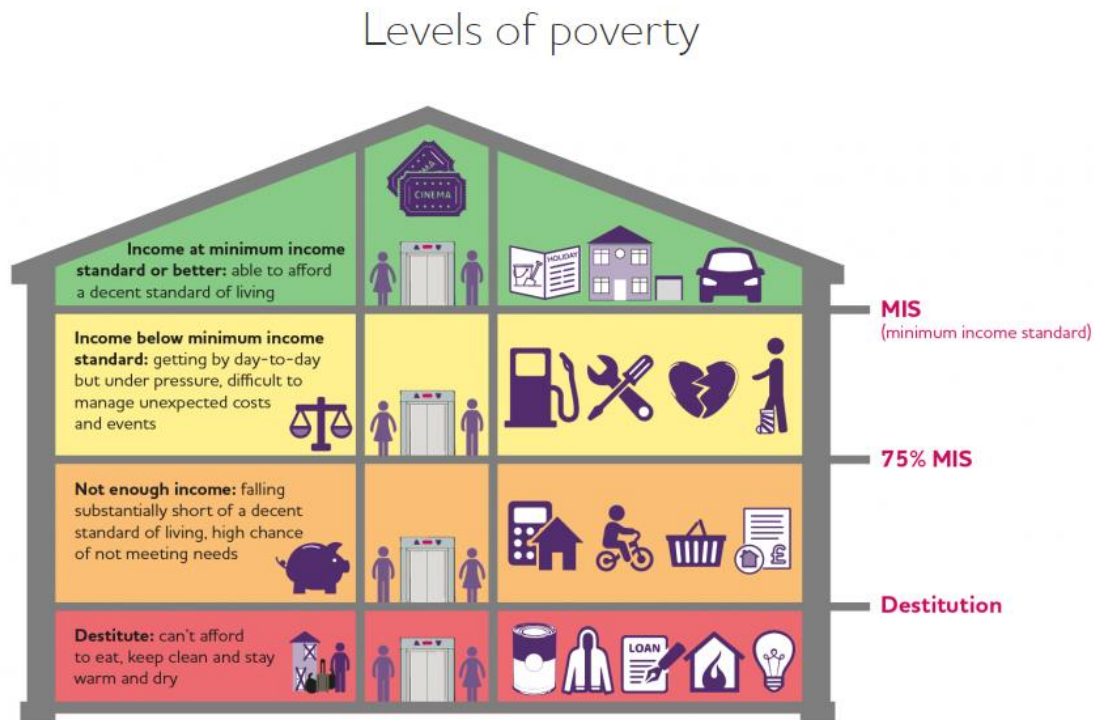
Measures include:

- JRF's Minimum Income Standard (MIS) – MIS itself is not a measure of poverty, but is what the public has told us is sufficient income to afford a minimum acceptable standard of living
- Relative income poverty, where households have less than 60% of contemporary median income
- Absolute income poverty, where households have less than 60% of the median income in 2010/11, uprated by inflation
- Material deprivation, where individuals / households can't afford certain essential items and activities
- Destitution, where individuals / households can't afford basics such as shelter, heating and clothing.

Relative and absolute poverty can be presented before and after housing costs (these include rent or mortgage interest, buildings insurance and water rates) and are presented after direct taxes and National Insurance, including Council Tax.

For the purpose of this strategy, the focus is on poverty after housing costs are taken into consideration.

JRF present these levels of poverty diagrammatically as below¹⁸:

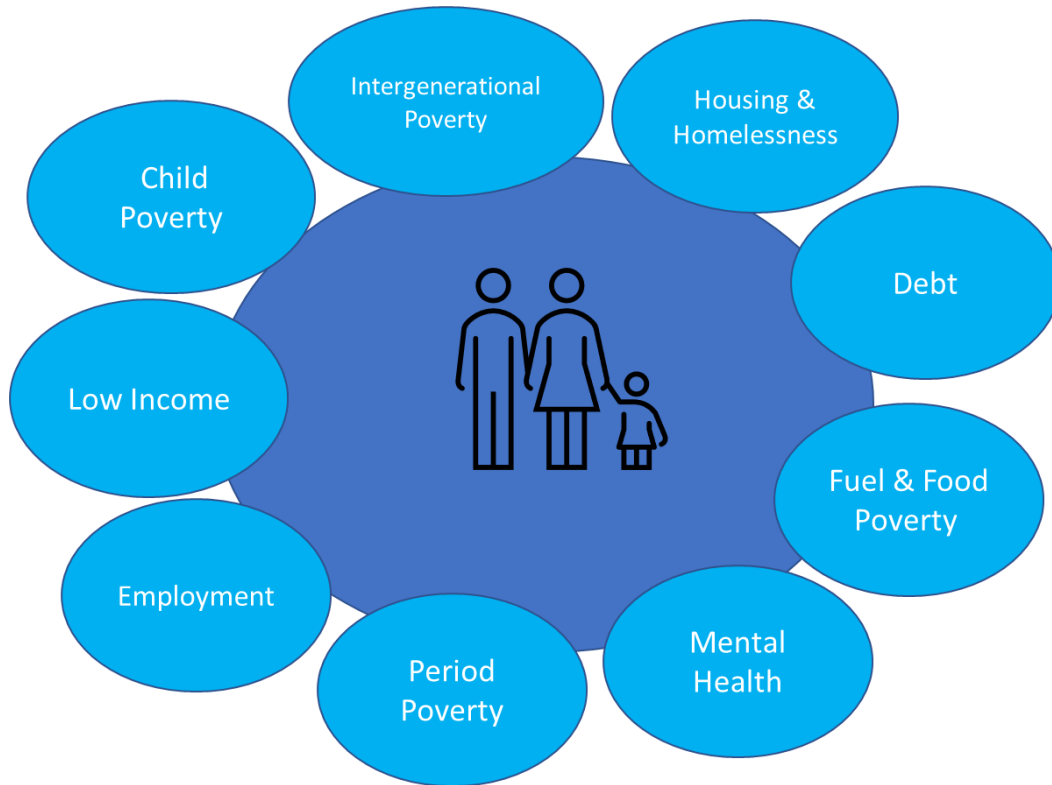


There are 3 levels of poverty

¹⁸ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, What Is Poverty, 2020.

Appendix 4 – Key Aspects of Poverty

In the council, our person-centric approach identifies 9 key aspects affecting poverty, one or more of which may impact on people facing poverty within the Borough. Many people in entrenched poverty will be affected by several, if not all, of these aspects.



These aspects have been identified from an analysis of research by JRF and others into poverty brought up to date to give increased prominence to aspects such as food and fuel poverty which have increased in visibility since the start of the pandemic.

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