

"No family left behind"

Rotherham's commitment to addressing child poverty



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1. Welcome

Rotherham Council is committed to putting families at the heart of decision making. Last year's family friendly budget demonstrated this commitment, with funding for baby packs, upgrades to play areas and significant investment in youth work and Early Help services. Children and young people achieving their potential is a key priority at the heart of our recently refreshed Council Plan.

To ensure no family is left behind we will strive to mitigate the impact of poverty and work with organisations to reduce the barriers that children, young people, and families who live in poverty may experience.

Long-term change requires government understanding of the root causes, the importance and urgency of alleviating child poverty and the harm it causes, including the vulnerability of children to exploitation. We welcome the additional funding that was provided to the Council for 2025/26 and the commitment to tackling child poverty.

As Lead Member for Children and Young People, I am passionate about creating the conditions for all children to achieve their ambitions. This strategy demonstrates the shared partnership goal of addressing child poverty.

In Rotherham we have developed Four Cornerstones which we believe are essential for ensuring that good practice in working with children, young people, parents, and carers is achieved. These are:

Welcome and Care

Value and Include

Work in Partnership

Communicate

We recognise that when these cornerstones are integrated into practice, trust is developed and progress in achieving outcomes for children and young people is made. Without trust, systems, partnerships, organisations, and families cannot work together effectively and meaningful partnership work cannot be achieved.

We acknowledge that the impact of poverty can make it even more difficult for children and young people to feel welcomed and cared for, valued and included.

This strategy has been informed by the voices and experiences of children and young people who have described what poverty means to them and how we need to work in partnership to not only provide support to mitigate the impact of poverty but also remove the stigma from accessing support.

This partnership commitment involves our vibrant voluntary and faith sectors, public and private sectors, education providers, families, and communities. I am immensely proud of how we work together in Rotherham, and this is how we achieve the results we do in such challenging circumstances.

This strategy aims to communicate to everyone in Rotherham, children, young people, families, and communities what we are doing to create HOPE and tackle child poverty.

Cllr Victoria Cusworth

2. Introduction

What is Poverty?

Poverty can mean different things to different people. Poverty is not having enough of the things you need, such as money, food, housing, heating, etc, to live and participate in society in the way that other people around you do.

Poverty can affect every aspect of a child's life and may be experienced in a range of ways by children

Poverty is measured based on money, with the standard way to measure child poverty being relative household income. A child is said to be in poverty if they live in a household with income below 60 per cent of the national average (median) income.

What is the impact of poverty?

Poverty can mean children going without basic necessities – going to school or bed hungry, wearing shoes that are too small or that don't keep their feet dry, or sleeping on a mattress on the floor because there is no money for a bedframe. . Children living in poverty may grow up in cramped, damp homes, go without a warm winter coat, not have toys other children do. If you are born in poverty, you are more likely to have low birthweight and less likely to survive the first year of life, more likely to suffer from asthma and other childhood diseases, and at increased risk of experiencing poor health in later life as a result.

It can mean missing out on everyday fun, play and relaxed time with family because family outings are too expensive, and being excluded from social activities with friends because there isn't money for a cinema ticket or birthday present. Poverty denies children chances to try new things and develop their interests and talents through extra-curricular clubs and even school trips and activities.

Children living in poverty are more likely to have poor mental health, are at higher risk of psychological distress and do less well in education. They can be more at risk of being targeted by bullies if they do not have things other children do e.g. clothes/toys/ phones. Living in poverty can make children more vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous adults if they are then offered the things others have that they do not.

For many children, poverty also means growing up too soon – having to deal with adult worries and anxieties when they are still children.

Poverty affects all aspects of childhood. It affects friendships and opportunities, creating isolation, stigma, trauma, and sadness.

3. Consultation Feedback

We asked the Children and Young People's Partnership Board how they would describe what poverty is...



And what they think living in poverty means for children and young people...



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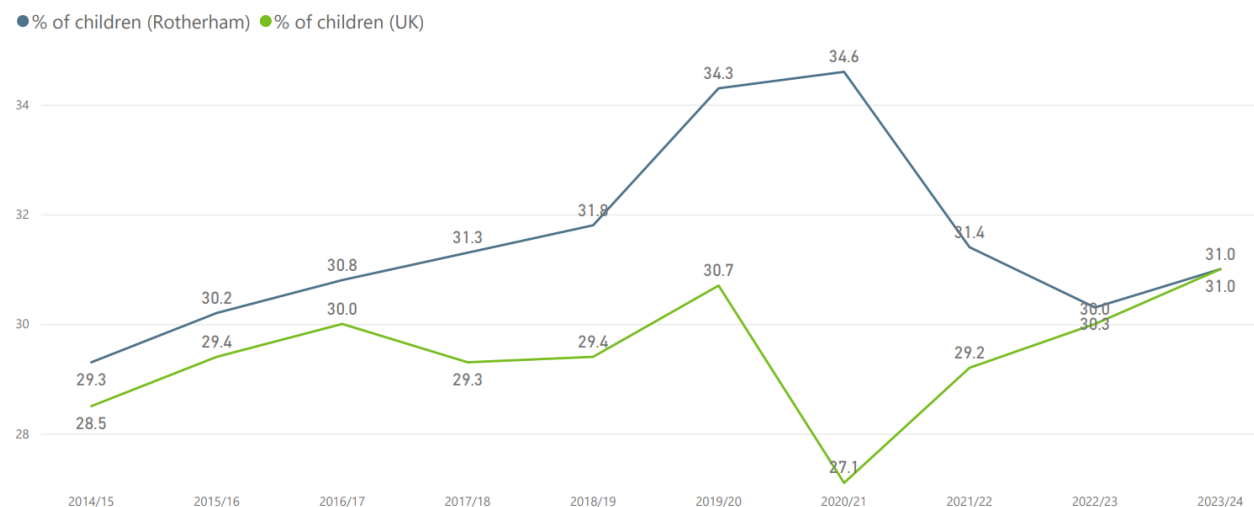
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4. Poverty across the borough

Levels of poverty and deprivation remain too high and the impact on children is too great across too much of the borough.

Based on research from End Child Poverty, 31% of Rotherham children were living in poverty in 2023/24. This is the same as the national average, and a slight increase on the 2022/23 figure of 30.3%. Making national comparisons about poverty can be misleading as poverty is driven by labour markets (levels of employment, sectors of work and rates of pay), housing markets (renting/ costs etc) and rates of benefit receipt, and these things are different in different areas. The graph below shows the percentage of children in poverty before and after the pandemic in 2020/21.

Percentage of children in poverty (according to End Child Poverty data)



The population of Rotherham borough is 271,195 (2023 mid-year (30 June) estimate of population) with an age structure that is slightly older than the national average. Rotherham has 58,096 children aged under 18, representing 21.4% of the local population (ONS, mid 2023).

On the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 (IMD 2019) Rotherham ranks as the 35th most deprived upper tier local authority in England out of a total of 151 authorities.

35% of Rotherham's neighbourhoods are in the 20% most deprived in England, and 22% of the population lives in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods. No neighbourhoods in Rotherham are in the least deprived (most affluent) 10%.

Relative poverty is when households have an income that is 60% less than average household incomes in a specified area. Absolute poverty is when the household income is below a certain level. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation identify groups with unacceptably high rates of poverty, these include Families with children, Minority ethnic groups, Disabled people, Informal carers, People in workless households, People claiming income-related benefits and Social and private renters.

In 2024, 26% of Rotherham children lived in absolute low-income families (England 19%). Our Free School Meals (FSM) entitlement rate is above the English national average (27.2% compared to 24.7% at Primary, 30.2% compared to 25.9% at Secondary – DfE 2024/25). 25.9% of Rotherham's school age population is from an ethnic minority background (England 38%) (DfE 2024/25).

Free School Meal eligibility (%) Rotherham & England by Year



31% of children are living in poverty in Rotherham.

Around 4,400 people (a rate of 3.7%) aged 16 and over in Rotherham were unemployed in the year ending December 2024. This has decreased compared with the year ending December 2023 (6.6%) but is worse than the 2.9% across Yorkshire and the Humber.

In 2023/24 58.8% of adults in Rotherham were physically active, up from 54.9% in 2018.

The percentage of eligible 2-year-olds in Rotherham taking up an early education place continues to rise, with 89% taking up a place in academic year 22/23. Take-up of early education has a positive impact on outcomes for children.

Partners are fully committed to working together to make decisions on a best for Rotherham basis

We know there is more to do...

In Rotherham, it is estimated that 16.6% of households were in fuel poverty in 2022. This figure is expected to increase with the continued rise in fuel prices. According to figures published in 2022, those from ethnic minorities (19.1%) are more likely to be in fuel poverty in England compared to white counterparts (12.6%).

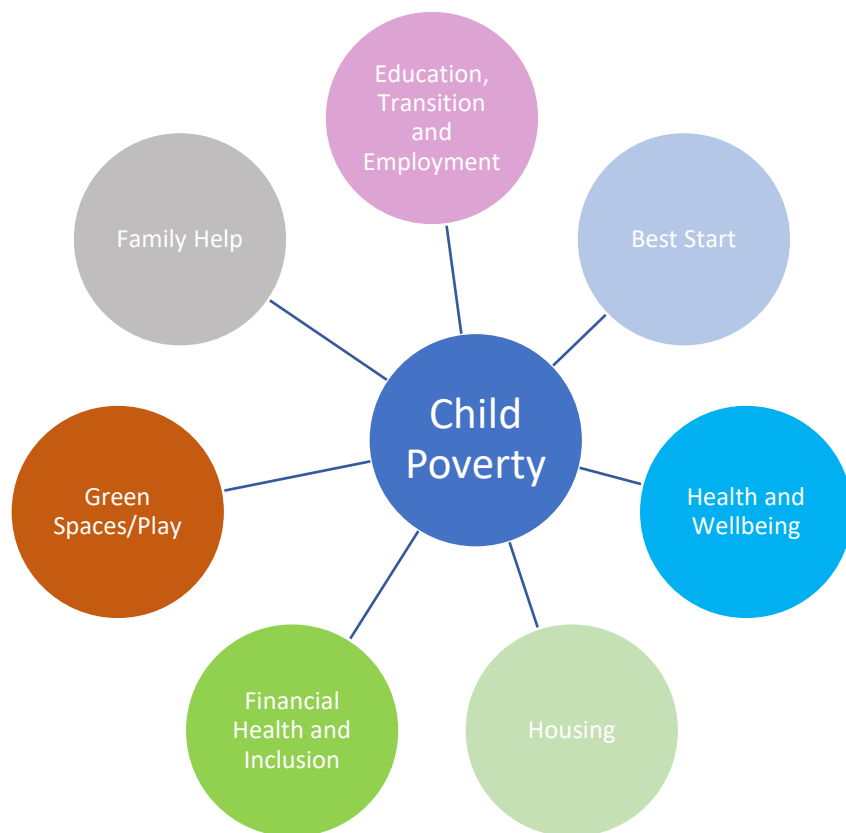
Almost 1 in 4 (24.7%) children aged 4-5 years and 2 in 5 (40.5%) aged 10-11 years were categorised as overweight or obese in 2023/24. For adults, almost 3 in 4 (74%) were categorised as overweight or obese in 2023/24.

12,650 Rotherham children were eligible for free school meals in 2023/24, a rise of 84% since 2015/16.

Healthy life expectancy at birth in Rotherham is 56 years for a male and 55.6 years for a female (2021-23), significantly lower than the England averages of 61.5 and 61.9, respectively.

5. Shared priorities

Since 2020, local partners have directed substantial resources towards activity aimed at alleviating poverty. This has included working together to tackle the following poverty themes:



Health and wellbeing – reducing health inequalities related to poverty including reducing barriers to accessing services.

Best start - practical support and additional resources that enable young children to thrive

Green spaces/play – improving access to green spaces and encouraging engagement with the universal offer.

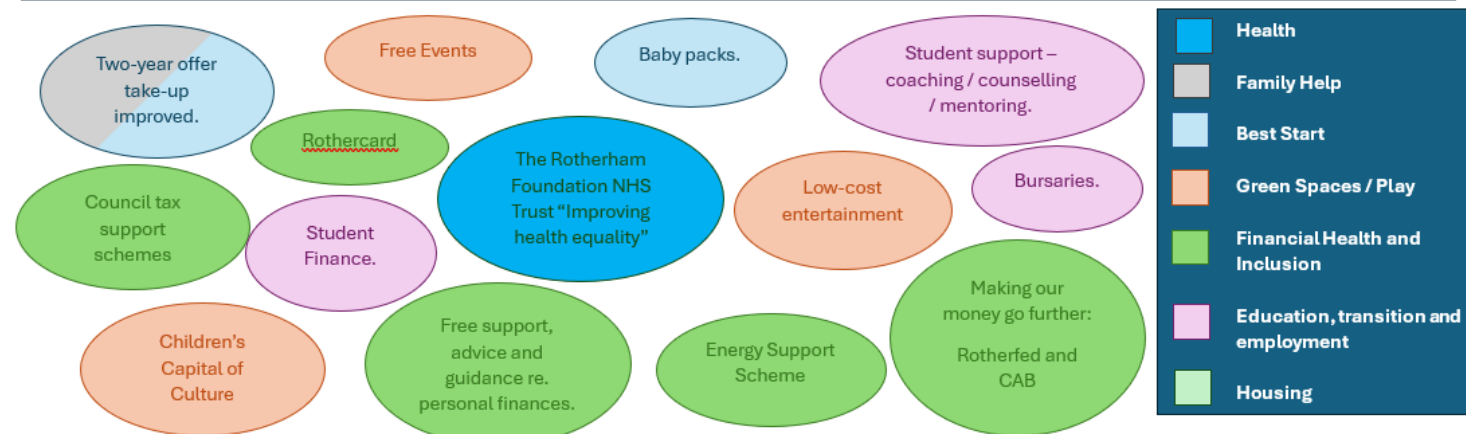
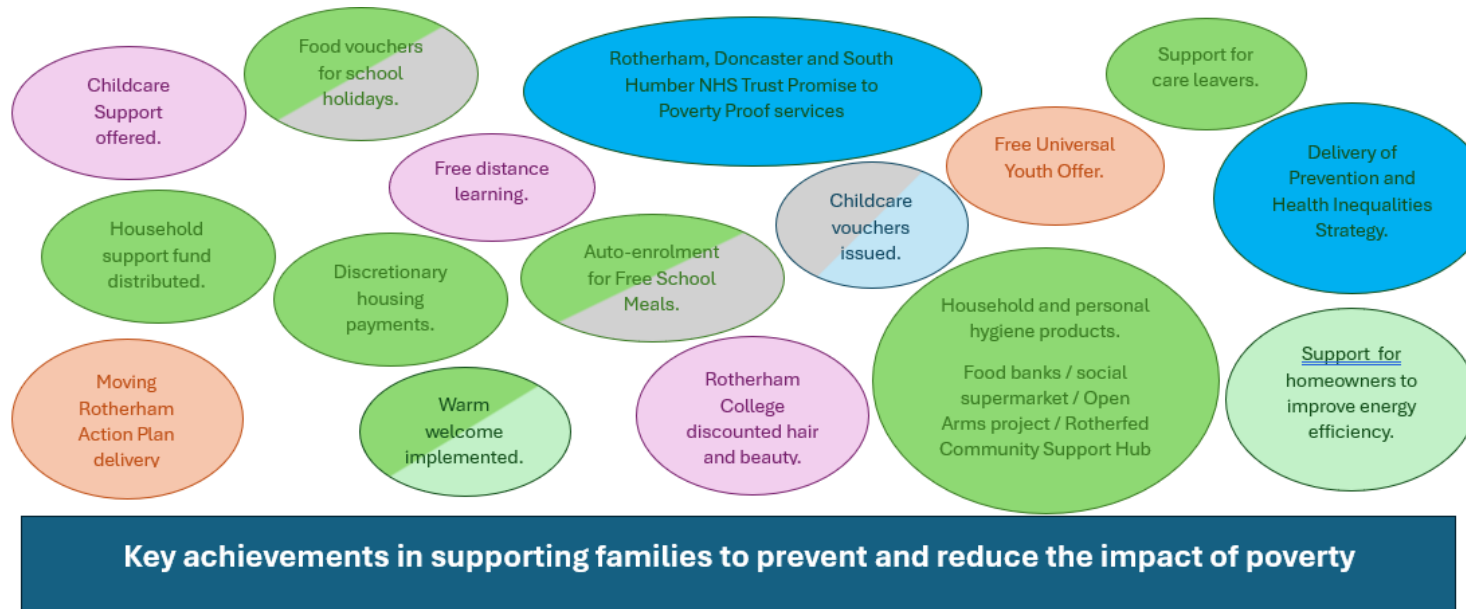
Financial health and inclusion – maximising income, practical help, and emotional support.

Education, transition, and employment - improving access to learning/ work.

Housing - improving access to suitable and affordable quality accommodation.

Family help – wide-ranging support, advice and information delivered in an accessible and integrated way.

6. Key Achievements over last 5 years



7. Our Ambition

No family left behind...

While poverty can affect anyone, research highlights that certain groups are disproportionately vulnerable due to underlying inequalities. Lone parents, large families and families where a child or parent has a disability can be particularly vulnerable. These factors not only increase the likelihood of experiencing poverty but also reduce the ability to mitigate its impacts.

To achieve our ambition of ensuring no family is left behind, we focus on four key priorities:

- **Help** – help people when they need it the most by mitigating the impact of poverty. Comprising direct, practical assistance, this includes financial support to help meet the cost of essentials, including council tax and energy bills. It also includes access to our crisis support offer, providing access to food and crisis loans when people need it the most.
- **Opportunities** – help people out of poverty through clear pathways that develop skills and capabilities, increasing their chances of finding secure, sustainable employment. This includes working to create a more inclusive economy in the borough by supporting the creation of more and better jobs that local people can access, and the support provided through Gulliver's Skills Street, the Council's Employment Solutions service and business support programmes.
- **Prevention** – prevent poverty by increasing household income and giving people access to the resources they need. For example, this includes offering neighbourhood-based support through our family hubs, as well as the provision of advice and guidance from our voluntary and community sector partners on finance and benefits and access to a sustainable supply of food through our borough's social supermarkets.
- **Engagement** – address social exclusion by ensuring access to goods, services and facilities and give young people and their families a voice. This includes action to improve transport connections, healthy holiday activities and initiatives such as the Looked After Children Council.

This strategy, reflects Rotherham's unwavering commitment to tackling the root causes of poverty, uniting efforts across the borough to enhance family prosperity and create a more equitable future for all. Importantly, it also reflects the importance of giving young people and their families a voice, recognising that solutions should be informed by people's experiences.

While our ambition is to prevent and reduce poverty, there will be times when people will find themselves struggling. When this happens, we must be ready to help those in need, ensuring no family is left behind.

Rotherham has strong, vibrant communities who come together and support each other in times of difficulty. It is vital that alongside seeking to prevent poverty, we do all we can to support those who may need extra help from time to time.

This overarching approach underpins action in the Council Plan, the Rotherham Together Partnership Plan, and the Rotherham Integrated Health and Social Care Place Plan. This is also referenced in the following strategies:

- Prevention and Health inequalities Strategy
- Culture Strategy
- Digital Inclusion Strategy
- Housing Strategy 2025-28
- Family Help Strategy 2024 – 2029
- Employment and Skills Strategy 2025 – 2030

Specific actions will also be included in future years' strategy development and annual delivery plans.

Priorities

Help	Opportunities	Prevention	Engagement
Help people with the impacts of poverty when they need it the most	Help people out of poverty through clear pathways that develop skills and capabilities	Prevent poverty by increasing household income and giving people access to the resources they need	Address social exclusion by ensuring access to goods, services and facilities and giving young people and their families a voice
Key actions and programmes			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Childcare support and vouchers, including improved take up of free childcare for two-year-olds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student support, counselling and mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family hubs offering neighbourhood-based support for new parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free use of PCs and free training at libraries, with free SIM cards at most sites; similar offer via Citizens Advice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council tax support and discretionary housing payments to help with rent or housing costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment Solutions service offering tailored pathways to access work and training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free support and guidance on finances and benefit eligibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wide-ranging support for carers including young carers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of free household and personal hygiene products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment and skills schemes addressing health and other barriers to work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Federation/Citizens Advice 'Making our money go further' project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthy holidays scheme providing free activities for eligible children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food vouchers during school holidays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SY investment zone and other sub regional investment programmes to create more good jobs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open Arms project financial inclusion community hubs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rothercard discount scheme and raising awareness of low-cost entertainment options
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School uniform vouchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business support programmes helping people to start and grow businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support packages for care leavers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universal youth offer, expanding and enhancing youth services across the borough
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crisis support – foodbanks and crisis loans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating opportunities through social value commitments in council contracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social supermarkets offering low-cost food, plus advice and support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements to children's play areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Energy grant scheme to help with winter heating bills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing apprenticeships across Rotherham partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Real Living Wage – paying people a fair wage and encouraging others to do the same 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase access to public transport through bus franchising, demand-responsive transport trials, and concessionary fares

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Help people with the impacts of poverty when they need it the most	Help people out of poverty through clear pathways that develop skills and capabilities	Prevent poverty by increasing household income and giving people access to the resources they need	Address social exclusion by ensuring access to goods, services and facilities and giving young people and their families a voice
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing support, including increasing affordable housing provision and reducing fuel poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm Welcome offering free community spaces to meet people and make connections
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baby packs containing essential items for newborns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looked After Children Council improving services for looked after children

Our strategy is, unashamedly, built on **hope**. Hope that, through our comprehensive, partnership-based approach, we can: help children and families experiencing poverty through direct support; provide clear pathways out of poverty by tackling barriers to employment; take wide-ranging preventative action through family hubs and other initiatives; and work with families and young people to ensure their voices are heard and they are not excluded from society.

To address the causes of poverty, reducing its occurrence and impact and empowering families with the tools and opportunities needed to thrive, we must address the systemic drivers of poverty. This will not happen overnight. Instead, solutions are required that lead to lasting transformation by creating a more inclusive economy that works for everyone.

This includes the significant local focus on social value, with the Council increasing the amount we spend with local firms by 36% and requiring, in our larger contracts, that suppliers deliver additional benefits, such as offering work experience opportunities or apprenticeships.

By working with the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, we will not only attract investment, creating more and better jobs, but also provide targeted, sustained support to ensure that they are accessible to all our communities. This means, for example, delivering improvements to public transport alongside action to improve skills.

We understand, too, that there is a correlation between poverty and poor health. Lower income is associated with more stresses, which can harm health and allow fewer opportunities for good health. In Rotherham, people not only live shorter lives than the England average, but they can expect to live for a longer proportion of their lives in poor health, which directly impacts on their ability to engage with all the opportunities needed to thrive.

There are also significant health inequalities within Rotherham, both geographically and experienced by different protected characteristic or inclusion groups (e.g. ethnic minority communities or people with learning disabilities or autism).

Our continuing partnership efforts to improve health and wellbeing, focusing particularly on prevention and inequalities, will complement the efforts to tackle child poverty, boosting children's life chances and delivering better outcomes for families regardless of their background.

What next?

To assess progress, a range of success measures, set out below, will be embedded in the Council's corporate reporting framework. This will ensure regular oversight as part of the council plan reporting process, given the alignment of this document to the plan. Specific actions will also be included in future years' annual delivery plans.

A child poverty dashboard is updated each April as part of the Rotherham Data Hub (Rotherham's joint strategic needs assessment). This dashboard will support us to measure impact.

Given that a partnership approach is fundamental to the strategy's success, update reports will also be taken through the Rotherham Together Partnership structures via the Health and Wellbeing Board, reflecting the interrelationship with health and inequalities. In addition, regular engagement will take place with the Children and Young People's Partnership.

Whilst there is a lot that can be done locally, national policy is crucial to reducing child poverty.

We welcome the government's commitment to developing a comprehensive child poverty strategy, guided by input from children, families, and stakeholders. This should be an urgent priority for the government, aiming to transform lives and communities by breaking the link between a child's background and their future success. This will need to be supported by appropriate funding, ensuring that the resource is in place to deliver the activity required.

Rotherham partners know that it is imperative to continue our work to address economic and health inequalities, actively supporting government plans to reduce child poverty through initiatives that increase family income, expand access to childcare, reduce energy costs, and make housing more affordable.

Together, we will bring hope to children throughout the borough and keep our promise that no family is left behind.

8. Measures of Success

Measures of Success

In measuring progress we recognise that national policy, particularly linked to the welfare system, has by far the biggest influence on the headline measure of relative child poverty.

We will track a range of proxy measures that indicate the direction of travel on child poverty.

- Number and % of children eligible for free school meals
- The rate of children (per 10,000) on a child protection plan.
- Achievement of disadvantaged pupils
- An increase in the value of Rotherham's economy
- An improvement in the skills of residents in the borough
- An increase in the proportion of the working age population who are in work (or actively looking for work) in Rotherham
- An increase in the number of businesses in Rotherham per 10,000 residents
- An increase in the proportion of eligible 2-year-olds taking up an early education place as soon as possible
- An increase in the proportion of pupils passing the phonics screening in year 1
- Improve GCSE grades in the borough relative to the national average
- An increase in the number of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan in mainstream schools
- Maintain the number of suitable homes that are available for care leavers
- An increase in the proportion of children in care living within 20 miles of home
- An increase in the proportion of households supported who were prevented or relieved from homelessness
- An increase in the number of new homes delivered with council support
- An increase in the proportion of council homes meeting 'Decent Homes' standard
- Children in low-income families
- Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (linked to IMD)
- % children aged 4-5 years categorised as overweight or obese

- The rate of depression at population level
- Estimated % of households in fuel poverty
- Inequality in life expectancy at birth (annual)
- Number of years in ill health (adults)
- Average full time weekly wage
- Economic inactivity rate
- Levels of crime and anti-social behaviour
- Healthy life expectancy at birth (annual)