Royal Greenwich

Anti-Poverty Strategy
Anti-Poverty Strategy for the Royal Borough of Greenwich

Content

Introduction............................................................................................................

Vision.....................................................................................................................

Local and national context....................................................................................

Approach to tackling poverty................................................................................

Priority Groups

Unemployed 18 – 25 year olds.................................

Families in poverty..........................................................

Households in fuel poverty...............................

Conclusion..............................................................................................................
Introduction

1.1 This document sets out a vision for tackling poverty in Royal Greenwich and identifies the strategic priorities that underpin our approach. Our approach is dependent upon and complements the strategy for sustainable growth in the borough. The overarching aim is to ensure that borough’s residents are able to take advantage of opportunities for improving the quality of their lives.

1.2 Analysis carried out by the council, including through the Child Poverty Needs Assessment, has identified a number of groups in the borough who are particularly vulnerable to poverty. Many of these will be adversely affected by the Government’s welfare reforms. In the context of reduced budgets and a rapidly changing public services landscape, there is a strong case now for focusing our anti-poverty work on these vulnerable groups. Supporting people on a path towards sustained employment will be a key focus for this work.

2. Vision

2.1 To reduce poverty and improve the life opportunities of people living in the borough, with an emphasis on supporting communities and individuals to raise their own aspirations to become more resilient and better equipped to overcome the barriers to success and prosperity that they face.

3. Context

3.1 Greenwich has a rich heritage legacy from its maritime and military past, largely associated with the river, and from its more recent industrial history centred at Woolwich Arsenal. Woolwich served as a royal dock for 350 years, and was one of the world’s largest centre for arms manufacture. The dockyard and arms manufacture provided major employment for the local population. The borough’s employment base dramatically declined following the Second World War and the subsequent collapse of manufacturing, culminating in record levels of unemployment during the 1980s and early 1990s.

3.2 Over the past ten to fifteen years, new investment in physical regeneration, including housing and infrastructure improvements, has significantly improved the prospects for economic growth in the
borough and considerable in-roads have been made in helping people access employment. This has resulted in a narrowing of the gap between the unemployment rate in Greenwich and that of London as a whole. Nevertheless, poverty continues to blight the lives of a number of Greenwich’s residents.

**Poverty in Greenwich:**

3.3 According to the most recent indices of deprivation (2010), Greenwich ranked as the 28th most deprived local authority district in England and 8th most deprived in London.

3.4 In November 2013, there were 21,100 people in Greenwich receiving out of work benefits (12.0% of the working age population). This compares with 10.2% for London and 10.6% for Great Britain.

3.5 Greenwich also has a higher than average JSA claimant count rate. In April 2014, 5,703 people (3.2% of the working age population) were claiming compared with 2.8% in London and 2.7% in Great Britain. The claimant rates are particularly high in Woolwich Common, Woolwich Riverside and Plumstead. Whilst the claimant count rate has been consistently higher than the average figures for London and England, Greenwich has had a much slower increase over the past ten years.

3.6 Long-term unemployment fell by 22% between April 2013 and April 2014 (same as the fall across London as a whole). However, the percentage of all JSA claimants who have been out of work for more than one year rose from 28% in April 2013 to 30% in April 2014. The equivalent figures for London over the same period were 29% and 31%.

3.7 The latest figures (2011) show that there were 17,500 children in poverty in Greenwich. This represents 29.2% of all children compared with 26.2% in London and 20.1% in England. Between 2010 and 2011, the number of children in poverty in Greenwich fell by 555, a fall of 1.4 percentage points.

3.8 In 2011, Greenwich had the 13th highest child poverty rate in London and the 25th highest in England.

**National context:**
3.9 A number of linked national developments are likely to have a significant impact on poverty and deprivation in Greenwich over the coming period, presenting both challenges and opportunities for the borough.

**The wider economy and public spending cuts:**

3.10 The prospects for growth in the London economy are now much better than they were at the start of the recession in 2008. However, the Government remains committed to reducing the budget deficit as quickly as possible, with public spending cuts being one of the key ways of achieving this. The 2012 Autumn Statement asked Whitehall departments to find additional savings of 1% in 13/14 and 2% in 14/15 on top of those already announced. The 2013 Spending Review report announced a further reduction in overall public spending of £11.5 billion in 2015/16. This is likely to reduce the capacity of local public services to respond to the needs of people facing poverty and deprivation.

**Welfare and social housing reforms:**

3.11 The measures set out in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 were intended to further the Government’s policy objectives of reducing the size of the welfare budget and using the welfare system to incentivise aspiration and “make work pay”. The reforms, particularly the introduction of a cap on the total amount of benefit that households can receive and new restrictions on housing benefit entitlement, have put more people in the borough at risk of poverty, although the nature and extent of their impact will only become clear over time.

3.12 A reduction in the amount of money being made available to the Homes and Communities Agency for new affordable housing provision and the introduction of the *Affordable Rent* model (under which housing associations are able to charge new tenants up to 80% of market rents) further reduces the housing options of people on low incomes.

4. Our approach to tackling poverty

*Promoting social mobility/raising aspirations:*
4.1 Children born into poorer families in Greenwich continue to face barriers to social mobility. For example, children eligible for free school meals in the borough are much less likely to take A’ levels and to progress to higher education; and young people from deprived backgrounds make up a high proportion of those who are NEET.

4.2 There is evidence both nationally and locally that low aspirations within some communities may itself be a barrier to social mobility. A key thrust of our approach will be to support individuals and communities in raising aspirations as a contribution towards improving social mobility.

**Supporting people into work:**

4.3 Sustained, good quality employment is the best route out of poverty for most people. The council has had considerable success in helping local people into employment through GLLaB and its partnerships with Jobcentre Plus and local employers. The prospects for local job growth in the medium-term are good, although many of the new jobs being created will require higher level qualifications and skills. Our overriding task is to help ensure that Greenwich residents are well placed to take advantage of these opportunities.

4.4 We will need to ensure that Royal Greenwich is well placed to take advantage of national government funding such as funding for apprenticeships and as a provider or sub-contractor for work support programmes and initiatives. Through GLLaB’s sub-contractor role to Prime Contractors A4E and Careers Development Group for the government’s Work Programme and to Reed in Partnership for employment support for families with complex needs, we are in a unique position to offer a “rounded” and locally informed service.

4.5 The Royal Borough is developing a proactive approach to working with people affected by the welfare reforms, offering support and advice to help them obtain sustainable employment. This includes the creation within the council of 250 temporary jobs in order to provide valuable work experience for people affected by the welfare reforms, particularly the total benefit cap, and who may have been out of work for a number of years.
**Skills for jobs:**

4.6 To help ensure that local people have the knowledge and skills to enable them to take advantage of the opportunities created by new investment in growth, the council is working with its partners to improve the borough’s education and skills offer, through for example skills centers and a new University Technical College.

**Affordable housing:**

4.7 The shortage of decent family homes available at affordable rents is a significant challenge for the borough. This problem is compounded by welfare reforms including reduced housing support for private sector tenants, the total benefit cap and the Affordable Rent Model, that allows registered social landlords to charge up to 80% for market rents for new or re-let homes. Larger families and single people aged under 35 are particularly affected by these reforms. The Council is seeking to maximise the supply of affordable homes, including family homes.

**Targeting individuals and a whole family approach**

4.8 Our approach is based on proactively identifying and contacting individuals and households who are most likely to be living in poverty. To this end the Council is making use of its own intelligence and working in partnership with other local agencies. All adults in the household are offered a multi-needs assessment, including an employment assessment.

**Priority groups:**

4.9 Three groups have been identified as being those in the borough most likely to be living in poverty or at risk of falling into poverty and our anti-poverty approach and action over the next three years will focus on these:

- unemployed young people
- families experiencing poverty
- households living in fuel poverty.

5. Priority Groups
**Unemployed 18–24 year-olds:**

5.1 Greenwich has a relatively high proportion of 18–24 year-olds claiming JSA compared to London as a whole. In August 2014, there were 1,110 18–24 year-olds claiming JSA in the borough (4.5% of all Greenwich 18–24 year olds). For London the figure was 3.2%. The percentage of 18–24 year-olds claiming JSA fell steadily over the twelve months from April 2013 in both Greenwich and London as a whole, from 6.2% and 4.4% respectively. This cohort remains a priority due to the damaging long-term impact of unemployment on young people.

5.2 Geographical information about this group is available at lower super output area level and this tells us that the numbers are spread fairly evenly across the borough, although there are higher concentrations in the north and east.

5.3 Increasing opportunities for training and employment for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds must be key priorities for Royal Greenwich if we are to tackle the problems associated with disaffected and disengaged youth. The riots seen in Woolwich during the summer of 2011 were an important reminder of the urgency of this challenge.

5.4 Housing is a further challenge for this group as accommodation options for unemployed single young people are limited under the benefit regulations, which restrict the amount they can claim to the shared room rate.

5.5 Our approach is to improve skills to help young people compete for job opportunities; provide integrated advice and support addressing barriers to work; investigate options for improving aspirations; and to take action to avoid homelessness.

5.6 To respond to these challenges, we will:

- Work with local private, public and voluntary sector partners to increase opportunities for work experience and apprenticeships, including by integrating commitments on apprenticeships into commissioning and procurement contracts;

- Create further apprenticeships within the council, including supporting new apprenticeships within GS Plus;
• Raise standards of post 16 education, including through:
  
o  consolidating and building upon the three skills centres that have been developed in partnership with major employers in the growth industries of catering/hospitality, digital skills and horticulture/equestrianism; and working with schools to increase the number of Greenwich young people engaged with the centres
  
o  establishing a University Technical College;
• Address the 16 – 19 year old group who are not in education, employment or training by influencing the appropriateness and range of the curriculum to engage pupils at risk of becoming NEET and ensuring good links between schools and local FE colleges;
• Work with our third sector partners to increase the range of opportunities for volunteering;
• Work with Thames Reach to identify larger properties suitable for single sharers;
• Work with private sector landlords to promote alternative forms of accommodation provision, such as houses in multiple occupation (bearing in mind the need to ensure the quality of such provision), shared accommodation and the use of private sector leasing to prevent homelessness amongst single and vulnerable young people;
• Explore “foyer schemes” for people aged up to 35 years, linked to training and employment;
• Include a requirement on providers to assist young people into education, training or employment, when re-commissioning young people’s supported housing;
• Continue to provide integrated advice and support to young people at The Point – a drop in service for young people. This includes employment advice and support to address barriers to employment such as substance misuse, in addition to housing advice.
5.7 **Measures of success:**

- A reduction in the percentage of young people aged 18–24 in the borough who are claiming JSA compared to the London average

- A reduction in the percentage of young people aged 18 – 24 in the borough who claim JSA for more than a year, compared to the London average

- Fewer young people aged 18–24 presenting as homeless

**Families experiencing poverty:**

5.8 Families are especially vulnerable to poverty and Royal Greenwich’s anti-poverty work focusses on three family types: families with complex needs, lone parents and larger families. There will be some overlap between these family types; for example, some of the lone parent families or larger families being targeted will also be families identified as having “multiple and complex needs”.

**Families with multiple and complex needs:**

5.9 There is good evidence, including from the council’s own Best Value review, that a relatively small number of families with multiple and complex needs are responsible for a disproportionate amount of anti-social and criminal behaviour in the borough. These families are also likely to be workless and to be living in relative poverty. The Best Value review found that families with complex needs cost the council alone somewhere in the region of £2–3 million per year. Using a broader definition, the DCLG’s Troubled Families Team estimates that there could be as many as 790 “troubled families” in Greenwich costing the taxpayer some £59,250m.

The Council has established the Families 1st Project to proactively contact and support this cohort of families, with a focus on supporting families into work.

5.10 However, it is recognised that families with multiple and complex needs face a number of significant barriers to employment including lack of qualifications, difficulties in accessing affordable childcare, physical and mental ill-health and chaotic lifestyles.
5.11 To respond to these challenges, we will:

- Develop a more integrated approach to supporting families with multiple needs. Key elements of our new approach includes:
  - A focus on whole family needs assessment (through the adoption of a “Team Around the Family” model)
  - The use of “contracts with consequences” to help ensure the engagement of families and services
  - Intensive support/challenge to family
  - Focus on outcomes to reduce anti-social behaviour, improve school attendance, and increase economic activity

- Provide intensive intervention for those families with the most entrenched problems, coordinating services around the family in a timely and holistic way, through our Families 1st team.

- Provide tailored interventions for families with multiple needs to address barriers to employment through our family employment support programme, delivered through Greenwich Local Labour and Business (GLLaB) and funded by the European Social Fund. This programme will work with between 600 and 700 individuals over the next three years;

5.12 **Measures of success**

- A reduction in the number of troubled families involved in anti-social behaviour and with family members aged under 18 years with a proven offence in the previous twelve months

- A reduction in the number of troubled families with children who are persistently absent from school, excluded from school or not on the school roll

- Number of people troubled families helped on a meaningful pathway to work (with a percentage of these obtaining sustained employment)

**Lone parents:**
5.13 There are approximately 8,117 lone parents in Greenwich claiming Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit. These are the lone parents who are either receiving out of work benefits or working but on a low income. Around 69% of those on out of work benefits are claiming Income Support. The large majority of these have a child less than five years old.

5.14 Lone parent families account for some 80% of all families in poverty in Greenwich. These families face increasing pressure to find employment as a result of stricter conditionality conditions linked to benefit entitlement. Since January 2012, lone parents whose youngest child is aged five have been expected to fulfil work conditionality requirements in order to receive benefit.

5.15 Our approach for this group is to support parents into work or in preparing for work. Many may have been absent from the labour market for some time or may have never worked. Building confidence, personalised employment advice and support, and the provision of affordable childcare is the key focus for tackling poverty for this group.

5.16 To respond to these challenges, we will:

- Deliver a family employment support programme, funded by the DWP/ESF – dedicated Family Employment Advisors will offer employment advice and assistance and liaise with other service providers to help coordinate “wrap around” support;

- Provide signposting advice and support through our network of Children's Centres. This will include signposting advice on childcare, employment and training, in work benefits and using contact opportunities to help build confidence and encourage uptake of work preparation activities;

- Provide short term crèches in Children’s Centres to enable parents to undertake work related activities such as training;

- Provide extended provision for 2 year olds from economically disadvantaged families, through government funding to enable more lone parents to take up employment opportunities; and continue to provide an information and brokerage service to
support parents in finding suitable child care provision, including advice on child care benefits;

- Work with other local employers, seek to increase opportunities for part-time and family friendly employment in the borough.

5.17 **Measures of success:**

- A reduction in the percentage of lone parents in the borough claiming out of work benefits compared to the London average

**Larger families:**

5.18 Larger families are more likely to be in poverty. In 2013, there were just over 6,000 families in the Borough with three or more children, 18% of all families.

5.19 Large families are disproportionately affected by the welfare reforms. Currently just over 200 unemployed families in Royal Greenwich lose benefit are affected by the Total Benefit Cap. Just under 40% lose £50 or more per week. Families in this group are likely to be at increased risk of homelessness.

5.20 The majority of those affected have three or more children, three quarters of households are lone parents and around half are households with at least one child aged under five years.

5.21 Affected families are live in all Council wards with the highest numbers in Thamesmead, Woolwich Common and Plumstead. 60% live in privately rented accommodation.

5.22 Affordable housing options for large families are limited. The South East London Strategic Housing Market Assessment carried out in 2009 indicated a need for 70% of all new social rented units to be 3 and 4 bed homes. In June 2014 there were 2,332 households on the RBG housing register needing a property with 3 or more bedrooms.

5.23 To respond to these challenges, we will:

- Continue to develop and update the profile of families affected by the benefit cap;
• Make direct contact with those affected in order to offer targeted employment and housing advice through a newly established, multi-disciplinary Welfare Reform Team;

• Provide holistic assessment and intervention planning for these families, focusing on support into employment (some of whom could be referred to one of the programmes for families with complex needs described above)

• Create over 250 temporary jobs within the council in order to provide valuable paid work experience; and work with local private sector employers to offer long-term employment or guaranteed job interviews to this cohort after an initial period of employment on the council scheme.

• Work with RSLs so that larger family homes developed and managed by RSLs remain as close to target rents as possible; with this requirement being built into the Council’s Core Strategy. Maintain on-going supply of new homes with registered providers – with at least 42% being 3+ bed homes;

• Work with private landlords, including through a landlord forum to explore a range of incentives to help maintain the supply of good quality housing in the private sector suitable for families. Incentives could include advice services and help with finding tenants.

• Increase the number of larger family homes in the council’s own stock through a programme of extensions to existing houses and conversions of non-residential properties, as well as through new build.

5.24 Measures of success:

• Number of households affected by the total benefit cap helped onto a meaningful path to work (with a percentage of these obtaining sustained employment)

• Fewer families with three or more children presenting as homeless compared to the London average

Households living in fuel poverty:
5.25 The most widely accepted definition of a household in fuel poverty is one in which a household needs to spend more than 10% of income on fuel to heat their home to an adequate standard; this is generally defined as 20°C in the living room and 18°C in the other occupied rooms.

5.26 Fuel poverty is a major problem. The latest statistics published by DECC for the year 2011 show that 8.1% of Greenwich households are in fuel poverty (low income, high costs indicator). This compares to 9.9% across London as a whole and a reduction of 3.2% since 2010.

5.27 The causes of fuel poverty are complex, although the main contributing factors are a combination of energy inefficient homes, low income and high fuel bills. The health effects associated with fuel poverty include excess winter mortality, cold induced illness and exacerbation of existing chronic illnesses.

5.28 Communities in Greenwich most at risk from fuel poverty are those that have disproportional low income and may have higher fuel costs because they are more likely to spend longer periods of time within the home i.e. older people, refugee communities, disabled people, and families on a low income with children, particularly lone parents. Very often it is these communities which are most difficult to reach.

5.29 To respond to these challenges we will:

- Improve the thermal efficiency of new homes by ensuring that new dwellings meet a satisfactory Code of Sustainable Homes level, including new Council homes;

- Raise awareness of energy efficiency advice and information through the provision of a dedicated phone line and email address; collaboration with third sector partner agencies and community groups and promotional events:

- Promote the Big London Energy Switch – a collective energy switching scheme to help reduce fuel bills;
• Provide advice and assistance to elderly and vulnerable residents on their entitlement to benefits and in particular, Winter Fuel payments, Cold Weather payments and Warm Homes Discount where applicable, through our Welfare Rights Service and commissioned advice services

• Improve household thermal efficiency for vulnerable people by for example:
  
  o providing simple energy efficiency measures through the council’s handyperson maintenance scheme;
  o delivery of the Stay Warm, Stay Safe campaign which offers a range of energy simple efficiency measures;
  o providing grants and interest free loans to vulnerable households for home improvements, including energy efficiency measures.

5.30 We are working in partnership with Osborne Energy and Climate Energy to secure Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding to deliver energy efficiency improvements to RBG owned block properties. For both these partnerships, we are coordinating energy improvements with other required works to ensure that the Greenwich Homes Standard is met – a “whole property” approach to refurbishment and improvement works as far as possible, by picking up all components that need to be repaired or replaced while contractors are on site in order to minimise disruption.

5.31 Improve the energy efficiency of our own Council housing stock through our Housing Capital Programme. A £2m, five year Fuel Poverty Programme will include solid wall insulation, boiler upgrades and replacements and solar photovoltaic panels – prioritising homes which have poor energy performance ratings.

5.32 **Measures of success**

  • A reduction in the number of households in fuel poverty
6. Conclusion

6.1 This Council’s approach for tackling poverty in the borough over the next three years focuses on the three priority groups considered to be most likely to be living in poverty or at risk from falling into poverty. A key thrust of this strategy is to help incentivise aspiration and social responsibility by supporting individuals on a path that leads to sustained employment. We will need to work in new ways with our partners to ensure that interventions designed to overcome the barriers to employment that many families face are effectively co-ordinated and address the needs of all family members.

6.2 At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that public spending will continue to be constrained as the Government pursues its priority of debt reduction and its agenda for welfare reform. It will be important to continue to monitor the impact of these developments on vulnerable residents and to work with our partners to ensure that we are able to offer appropriate support and advice.