

# Evaluation of Bury's Cost-of-Living and Anti-Poverty Strategy

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Impact

## Pre-Pandemic Challenges

Stagnation in life expectancy, the need to improve educational outcomes and persistent pockets of deprivation

## COVID-19 Pandemic

Revealed stark inequities. Worsening of existing problem with increase in deprivation and unemployment. Pandemic impact: long-term health issues, unemployment, financial loss, and business closures. Response highlighted power of communities and partnerships

## Let's Do It! Bury 2030 Community Strategy

Aim: faster economic growth and lower of deprivation compared with the average by 2030. Principles focused on local neighbourhoods, enterprise, collaborative delivery, and a strengths-based approach. 7 overarching outcomes : Improved quality of life, Improved early years development, Improved educational attainment, Increased adult skill levels and employability, Inclusive economic growth, Carbon neutrality by 2038, Improved digital connectivity

## Bury Cost of Living Support & Anti-Poverty Strategy

Reviewed anti-poverty strategy in response to crisis. Proactive support, socio-economic exclusion as a protected characteristic. Addressed digital inclusion, stigma, and data-driven approach. Key themes: tackling food poverty, wellbeing and poverty, finance and debt, adult poverty and education, work and wages, childhood poverty and education, communication and engagement, and housing related poverty including fuel poverty.

Action

## Evaluation Aim and Objectives

**Evaluation Aim:** Examine the design, implementation, and outcomes of Bury's cost of living support & anti-poverty strategy.

### **Objectives**

- Assess alignment with best practices from the Resolve Poverty document, *"Local Anti-Poverty Strategies - Good Practice and Effective Approaches."*
- Review the strategy's practical implementation and outcomes to date.

# Methods

Mixed-methods evaluation assessing the quality of the strategy, implementation, and outcomes to mitigate poverty and improve Bury residents' quality of life.

- **Three Key Components**

- **Quality Evaluation:** Assessed the strategy using a criterion-based framework against best practices, focusing on twelve critical elements essential for the success of anti-poverty strategies
- **Process Evaluation:** Conducted a document review of publicly available council records, an action plan review comparing planned activities to actual progress, and a partnership survey to assess collaboration effectiveness.
- **Outcome Evaluation:** Measured the strategy's success using publicly available and secondary data, analysing key metrics and incorporating case studies to understand the community impact.

## Quality Evaluation

Out of the 12 criteria from the criterion-based assessment framework derived from the "Local Anti-Poverty Strategies - Good Practice and Effective Approaches" document by Greater Manchester Poverty Action:

- **10 criteria were fully implemented**, demonstrating strong alignment with best practices.
- **2 criteria were partially implemented:**
  - **Prioritisation:** The strategy identifies focus areas but lacks explicit prioritisation, which could improve resource allocation and decision-making.
  - **Monitoring & Evaluation:** While mechanisms are in place, they require more detailed, quantifiable metrics for better precision and accountability.
- **Improvement Areas:** These partially implemented areas highlight opportunities to improve the strategy's effectiveness by refining prioritisation and strengthening monitoring and evaluation processes.

# Process Evaluation

## Implementation Successes

- Strong commitment and active governance; prioritised strategy across committees.
- Well-communicated with consistent reporting and documentation.
- Progress in reducing food poverty and supporting vulnerable groups, with initiatives like food vouchers and community pantries.

## Areas for Improvement

- **Outcome Tracking:** Lacked clear measures for longer-term impact (e.g., improvements in food security and financial stability).
- **Prioritisation:** Absence of prioritisation complicated balancing short-term relief with systemic, long-term goals.

## Key Challenges

- **System Delays:** Rollout of the Ascendant system and Money Advice Referral Tool delayed due to testing, training, and need for promotion.
- **Partnership Gaps:** Strong commitment and collaboration, but survey indicated need for organisational cultural sensitivity, skill development, and better decision-making distribution. Low response rate suggests potential engagement and communication barriers.

# Outcome Evaluation (Key Themes)

Theme	What is Bury Doing	Overarching Indicators and Challenges	Impact Without Intervention
<b>Tackling Food Poverty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bury is actively tackling food poverty by distributing 9,040 food parcels and supporting 868 households with food aid between April 2022 and April 2023.</li> <li>- Summer 2023 saw 1,636 young people access a variety of provisions from 28 providers, promoting food security and community support.</li> <li>- Healthy Start voucher uptake rose significantly from 65% (2021) to 80% (2024), helping more families access essential nutrition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 32% of households in Bury still experience food insecurity, slightly better than the Greater Manchester average of 34%.</li> <li>- 17.6% of residents face very low food security, and 12.8% face low food security levels, reflecting ongoing challenges in food access.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Food insecurity levels could rise sharply, leading to increased hunger, malnutrition, and broader health and wellbeing issues across the community.</li> </ul>
<b>Wellbeing and Poverty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 31,795 households supported through HSF providing essential aid (Apr-Dec 2023)</li> <li>- Beacon Service reached 3,000+ clients, with 80% reducing medical visits and 90% reporting positive life changes (Jan 21-Mar 24)</li> <li>- 45 schools participated in Daily Mile initiative (2023)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There's a significant drop in low satisfaction and "worthwhile" scores, showing improved resident well-being, though high anxiety remains, similar to the national trend.</li> <li>- Obesity rates are rising (67.2% in 2022/23),</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wellbeing indicators could worsen, with potential increases in healthcare needs and reduced life satisfaction.</li> </ul>
<b>Finance and Debt</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 13,360 council tax rebates distributed (2022 data) and 1,020 calls to cost-of-living helpline (Q1 2023) providing essential financial support.</li> <li>- 60% increase in childcare funding uptake (2023/2024) and support to 36 voluntary groups through Cost-of-Living resilience payments highlight targeted measures to alleviate financial strain.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Council Tax Support helped 12,433 residents in 2024, the lowest rate in Greater Manchester, indicating comparatively better financial resilience but also potentially underutilised support.</li> <li>- Financial distress markers: Bury reported 328 insolvencies (2nd lowest in GM), 77 DROs (lowest in GM), and 243 IVAs (2nd lowest in GM), showing fewer formal debt solutions but possibly hinting at stigma preventing residents from seeking assistance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Residents might face deeper financial hardship, risking increased debt, homelessness, and economic instability across the community.</li> </ul>
<b>Adult Poverty and Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1,328 learners attended Bury Adult Learning Service courses (2022/23)</li> <li>- 875 learners progressed to further education (2022/23)</li> <li>- Suggests effective pathways for adult learning and skill development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 32.31% of Bury residents hold Level 4 qualifications or above, slightly lower than Trafford but higher than other nearby areas, indicating competitive educational attainment</li> <li>- However, 18.54% of residents have no formal qualifications (2021), highlighting a need for continued education initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- educational gap could widen, limiting job prospects and economic stability for residents with low qualifications.</li> </ul>
<b>Work and Wages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Over 4,000 residents benefited from Bury's membership in the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter and Real Living Wage accreditation (2023)</li> <li>- 176 learners from Bury Adult Learning Service secured employment, self-employment, or voluntary work (2022-2023)</li> <li>- 126 learners actively seeking employment post-course completion (2022-2023)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resident pay averages £610 and workplace pay averages £620, showing a minimal gap, indicating competitive local wages aligned with resident needs</li> <li>- Employment rate dropped to 69% in 2023/24, down from a high of 81.6%, with unemployment benefits at 5.1% (third lowest in GM) potentially indicating stigma around claiming benefits or a reliance on informal support instead of formal assistance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employment outcomes and wage competitiveness could worsen, leading to increased financial instability and reliance on informal support networks, which may not provide sustainable assistance for residents</li> </ul>



Theme	What is Bury Doing	Overarching Indicators and Challenges	Impact Without Intervention
<b>Child Poverty and Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 13,518 households benefited from Free School Meals (FSM) during school holidays (April 2023 - December 2023).</li> <li>- Healthy Start voucher uptake increased from 65% in June 2021 to 80% in February 2024, reflecting growing support for young families.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 20.5% of children in absolute low-income families (2022/23), above the national average of 15.6%, while FSM eligibility at 23% is better than the national average.</li> <li>- Attainment 8 score at 45.6 shows slight improvement, yet highlights the need for stronger educational support for low-income families</li> <li>- Low NEET rate at 3.9% reflects effective local support, though high poverty and limited FSM coverage may impact long-term prospects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased food insecurity, educational challenges, and limited future opportunities for children in low-income families could worsen long-term inequalities in the community.</li> </ul>
<b>Household Poverty including Fuel Poverty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 38 households received assistance through the Homeless prevention Grant, and 220 residents benefited from Discretionary Housing Payments in 2023, helping to prevent homelessness.</li> <li>- 400 Winter Wellbeing Packs were distributed in Winter 2023, with 747 households receiving support for energy and water costs via the Housing Support Fund from April to December 202</li> <li>- 462 residents were identified for targeted housing support using Ascendant software in Winter 2023/24, showing proactive support.</li> <li>- 240 properties in Chesham benefited from energy efficiency upgrades through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, continuing through 2025</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 13.1% of households in Bury experience fuel poverty (10,860 households), a figure similar to the national average, highlighting the challenge of rising energy costs.</li> <li>- Bury has the lowest number of housing benefit claimants in Greater Manchester (5,995) and the second-lowest Universal Credit housing element claimants (16,195) in 2024, potentially suggesting underutilisation of financial support, possibly due to stigma or lack of awareness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More households could face increased risk of homelessness, and fuel poverty could deepen, leading to health and safety risks, especially in colder months.</li> <li>- Low uptake of available support could leave vulnerable residents struggling with housing costs, exacerbating financial stress and reliance on crisis interventions</li> </ul>
<b>Communication and Engagement Including Reducing Stigma</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1,020 residents accessed the Cost-of-Living (COL) support number in Quarter 1 of 2023, providing direct support to those seeking financial assistance.</li> <li>- COL-related posts on social media achieved a 1.46% engagement rate, with a click-through rate of 0.48%, indicating moderate public interaction and interest.</li> <li>- Emails about COL support had a 19.3% open rate, reflecting outreach efforts through digital channels to connect with residents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- While engagement through digital channels is ongoing, low click-through and open rates suggest potential barriers, such as digital literacy gaps, limited online access, or social stigma around seeking help.</li> <li>- Continued stigma around accessing support services may hinder some residents from reaching out, especially through visible or public channels, affecting overall uptake of available assistance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fewer residents may become aware of or access COL support, leading to unmet financial needs in vulnerable households.</li> <li>- Continued stigma could deter even more individuals from seeking assistance, potentially exacerbating issues related to poverty, financial stress, and isolation</li> </ul>
<b>Digital Inclusion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1,328 learners attended Bury Adult Learning Service courses (2022/23)</li> <li>- 875 learners progressed to further education (2022/23)</li> <li>- Suggests effective pathways for adult learning and skill development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Digital Exclusion Risk Index (DERI) for Bury's Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) shows a range from 1.491 (low risk) in Ramsbottom to 5.967 (moderate risk) in Holyrood, indicating varied levels of digital exclusion across areas.</li> <li>- Higher DERI scores in specific locations like Holyrood suggest a moderate risk of digital exclusion, highlighting the need for targeted interventions in these areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- residents in high-risk areas could face increased social and economic exclusion due to limited access to online services and digital skills,.</li> </ul>



**"It may be a dull grey day, but your team have brought some sunshine into it!"**  
(65 Yr old Male, Recipient of Winter Wellbeing Pack)

**"The kids really enjoyed it. They gave him a massive cheer when he walked in to the Rocky music. They asked him some really good questions such as 'what does he do to keep fit?' He is a local sportsman who they can relate to and are familiar with, so that's why we invited him in."**

(Collette Howe, Head of School, Guardian Angels RC Primary, referring to the Daily Mile launch with Scott Quigg. 15-minute walk or run to boost students' fitness, concentration, and wellbeing)

**Thank you so much for your generous support during what is a very difficult time. It is good to know that when doom mongers paint the system as broken, there is a place to go that offers an independent, but sympathetic assessment of a person's situation and then provides practical solutions.**

(Single parent, 6 children, severe financial hardships, rent arrears due to benefit cap, recipient of DHP and HSF)

**"I found the enrolment process very easy and straightforward, and I received the help and advice I needed to get started. Not only have I improved academically, but I now feel a sense of accomplishment and pride too."**

(Amber, a young mother of two in her early twenties who left high school with no qualifications, enrolled in Bury Adult Learning Centre's Functional Skills programme and became an Emergency Medical Dispatcher to build a better future for her family)

## Conclusion

- Bury's anti-poverty strategy demonstrates strong leadership and effective coordination, addressing immediate, medium, and long-term poverty challenges.
- The strategy provides a balanced approach that combines immediate relief, such as food, fuel, digital access, and financial aid, with ongoing initiatives in employment, health, financial literacy, and housing to build community resilience.
- Engagement with the community through events and feedback ensures the strategy remains relevant, inclusive, and responsive to residents' needs.
- Collaborative efforts with local businesses, health services, and community organisations have strengthened the impact in key areas like food security, digital inclusion, health, and housing.
- Moving forward, prioritising clear monitoring frameworks, reducing poverty-related stigma, strengthening partner alignment, and addressing digital inequities will increase the strategy's effectiveness and accountability.

# Recommendations

- **Set SMART Indicators:** Define clear, measurable goals for all themes, with both overarching and initiative-specific metrics for better tracking and data-driven decisions.
- **Develop a Local Cost-of-Living Dashboard:** Create an online dashboard to transparently track council resource allocation across areas like food assistance, housing support, and mental health initiatives. Regularly update overarching indicators and progress in each priority area to build trust and allow for responsive adjustments based on community need
- **Prioritise with an Evidence-Based Model:** Rank initiatives by their impact, balancing immediate needs with long-term poverty reduction goals for efficient resource allocation.
- **Further Strengthen Partnerships:** Address challenges in communication, roles, and commitment as highlighted in the partnership survey to unify strategy objectives.
- **Systematise Case Study Collection:** Collect diverse case studies to gain qualitative insights to improve programme understanding and refinement.
- **Improve Data-Driven Targeting for Support Services:** Improve data collection and analysis to identify specific areas and demographics with the highest needs, such as food insecurity, digital exclusion, or housing instability. Use insights from local data to prioritise resource allocation, focusing efforts on high-impact areas and regularly updating stakeholders on outcomes to ensure transparency and responsiveness.
- **Expand FSM Outreach and Eligibility Support:** Implement targeted outreach in schools and community centres to increase awareness and assist families with FSM applications
- **Reduce Stigma and Promote Access:** Implement evidence-based stigma reduction campaigns, using a strengths-based approach to normalise support access. Collaborate with trusted community spaces and leaders to encourage more residents to seek assistance without hesitation.
- **Use DERI Scores for Digital Inclusion:** Target digital training and device distribution where DERI scores indicate high need, partnering with community hubs.
- **Increase Physical and Mental Wellbeing Programmes:** expand community-led physical and mental health programmes. Collaborate with local health services and community centres to provide affordable access to mental health resources and promote healthy lifestyle initiatives tailored to community needs.
- **Improve Housing Stability & Address Fuel Poverty:** Continue focus on energy-efficient upgrades and winter support, ensuring vulnerable residents are well-supported.
- **Expand Family Hubs:** Grow Family Hubs to deliver localised resources, supporting child poverty and family stability in neighbourhoods.
- **Promote the Money Advice Referral Tool:** Increase awareness and training for community partners, making the tool a go-to for financial resilience.
- **Focus Employment on Fair Wages & Skills:** Align job programmes with fair wages and skills gaps, offering secure jobs that meet local needs.
- **Hold Biannual Partner Reviews:** Conduct formal reviews with partners twice a year to track progress, resolve challenges, and adjust as needed.
- **Consider External Factors in Planning:** Integrate economic and health factors into strategic reviews for resilience in the face of external changes.

A ship battles on through a fierce storm. Waves crash against it, winds tear at its sails, and from the shore, it may seem as if it is hardly moving. But every pair of hands, every pull of the ropes, and each call from the captain keeps it steady.

It may look like not much is happening, but without the crew's resilience, strong leadership, and everyone working together, the ship would be lost at sea. These combined efforts, though they might seem modest, are what keep it on course through the storm, inching closer to safe waters.

Thank You. Any Questions?