

Financial Wellbeing and Health

Why is a Financial Wellbeing a Public Health issue?

Having sufficient money to pay for the necessities of life such as housing, food, clothing, fuel and transport should be taken for granted here in England in the 21st century. The reality is many households simply cannot make ends meet to pay for the essentials, whereas others struggle to balance their weekly budget and it is harming their physical health and mental wellbeing.

- People in poorer households suffer more ill health and have lower life expectancies
- Infant mortality and low birth weight is higher in poorer households
- Children from poorer households are more likely to be diagnosed with a mental health problem in childhood
- There is an increase in reported stress and depression in households where debt is an issue, leading to a rise in GP consultations and prescribing of anti-depressants
- In severe cases of debt there is evidence of an increase in self-harm and attempted suicide
- Households on low incomes tend to be in sub-standard or overcrowded housing, typically in poor repair, is cold and usually damp. A lack of income results in an inability to afford the fuel to keep the house warm and dry (fuel poverty), or to fund necessary repairs.
- In rural areas, access to reasonably priced fresh food is more difficult in poorer households where there is a greater reliance on local food shops, which tend to have higher prices and a more restricted selection than in the larger towns.
- Poorer households tend to buy poorer quality or convenience foods which are high in fat, sugar and salt and low in fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Inequalities in people's diets results in inequalities in their health. Poor diet is associated with a number of diseases such as CHD, diabetes and cancers, as well as a higher prevalence of dental caries among children.
- Poorer households tend to rely more on public transport as it is unlikely the household can afford to buy and run a car or van. Transport costs are a significant element of their household expenditure
- Whilst there are some health benefits from the active travel elements of public transport, overall the impact on wellbeing is negative
- A dependency on low incomes and a reliance on public transport, particularly in rural Northumberland, affect access to work opportunities, culture, leisure and services, and

without transport poor access can lead to social exclusion, deprivation and mental and physical health issues

- Employment is generally seen as a route out of poverty. However, many jobs do not pay sufficiently well to lift income levels above the poverty threshold. This leads to an increase in poverty for working age adults in employment, which contributes to poor health outcomes.
- Whilst there have been some improvements in pensioner poverty largely due to welfare changes, the recent welfare reforms have been assessed as having the greatest impact on the poorest households, exacerbating the already lower health and wellbeing,
- The introduction of monthly universal credit payments, which will include housing benefit risks a negative impact on households with poor financial literacy as this is the group who are already struggling to budget effectively with weekly or fortnightly payments

What can the County Council do about it?

- Support multi agency working to establish financial wellbeing objectives and inform policy debate and discussion locally
- Work proactively to help reduce financial difficulties arising with council tax payments, housing benefit claims and council tax support
- Provide support to providers of affordable credit such as Credit Unions and Community Development Finance Institutions
- Through the public protection service, and working with the Illegal Money Lending Team, work towards eliminating illegal money lending, and help in bringing offenders to justice
- Help improve benefit take up for eligible claimants who are not currently claiming their entitlement
- Work in partnership with debt advice and welfare rights providers and the citizens advice bureau to raise awareness of the services available and improve uptake of the services they provide
- Support the provision of financial capability awareness in schools, adult education and community settings
- Engage communities in initiatives to tackle financial inclusion and financial wellbeing

- Train relevant council staff to develop skills and understanding of poverty and debt to help prevent or reduce financial difficulties
- Work to develop public and transport community transport solutions in partnership with other public sector partners and promote its availability to increase accessibility of those who need it.

How will it make a difference?

- Greater awareness of the benefits of joining a credit union, would lead to an increase in membership and greater access to affordable credit.
- An increase in the awareness of available welfare benefits and improvements in benefit take up levels, will improve household incomes
- Improved awareness of the range of financial and debt advice services provided through the county council and partners, will help households better manage their income and debt
- Improved financial capability and awareness will contribute to improved health and wellbeing
- Increased access to services will improve health and general well being.