

Outline of Poverty Proofing© audit and improvement activity in Sefton educational and cultural settings in partnership with Children North East

1. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to outline a 2-year programme of Poverty Proofing© audit and improvement in Sefton educational and cultural settings, which has been funded by Public Health and commissioned from Children North East (CNE).¹

2. Strategic context

Sefton Child Poverty Strategy

The strategy has a time horizon up to 2030. Currently, activity is moving from the inception and launch stage to creating the policy and practice conditions for delivery within and close to the Council, and increasingly more widely. Three very successful conference/learning events have helped to cultivate interest, and a sense of common purpose around tackling child poverty. It is essential that this momentum should not be lost. Poverty Proofing© schools is an ideal exemplar of hands-on, sector-led change to introduce now.

The concept of poverty proofing© is included under the **Pockets pillar** of the Sefton Child Poverty Strategy² (maximising financial resources of families on low incomes) and **the Prospects pillar** (improving the life chances of children in poverty), which prioritises,

‘Poverty-proofing the way that education, training, and employment opportunities are resourced, designed, and delivered – striving for equity.’

Specific actions suggested by stakeholders which are now included in the strategy are:

- Conduct a Poverty Proofing© audit to ensure that the design and delivery of services and support minimises hidden barriers to participation and maximises benefits.
- Develop and/or adopt a simple framework to help organisations Poverty Proof© design and delivery of services and support.

Education Excellence Strategy

A priority in the strategy is sharpening the focus on disadvantaged pupils including those children living in poverty. The relevance of child poverty is the negative impact it has on pupils’ educational attainment, their wider wellbeing, and their future life chances.

Sefton schools are at the forefront of the cost-of-living crisis and do support children and their families. Adopting a Poverty Proofing© approach to the school day provides a structured way to further minimise school costs for families and increase pupil participation in all aspects of school life.

3. Local need

A briefing on local need supplied to the CNE included the data below, which shows that in 2022 Sefton had larger disadvantage gaps than most local authorities at Key Stage 4 and at age 16-19, and that increases since 2019 were in the middle of the range compared to other LAs in England. One of the largest increases in learning gap at Early Years Foundation Stage since 2019, means that Sefton now has the third largest disadvantage gaps in England (6.8 months) at the end of reception. The

¹ [Poverty Proofing© Services - Children North East \(children-ne.org.uk\)](https://www.children-ne.org.uk/poverty-proofing-services)

² [Childhood Poverty Strategy 2022 \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://www.sefton.gov.uk/childhood-poverty-strategy-2022)

compound increase from a 6.8mths learning lag at age 5 to almost two years at age 16 is striking and concerning.

Data published by the Education Policy Institute³ in 2023 compares the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in English local authorities to the attainment of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally and expressing the difference in months of learning or grade points.

Educational stage	Disadvantage gap England, 2022	Disadvantage gap Sefton, 2022	Change in disadvantage gap since 2019, Sefton
Early Years Foundation Stage – end of reception	4.8mths	6.8mths 3 rd largest in England	+2.4mths 2 nd largest change in England
Key stage 2 – end of primary school	10.3mths	10.7mths Mid-ranking gap	+1.0mth Mid-ranking change
Key stage 4 – end of GCSEs	18.8mths	21.8mths Upper third of England LA figures	0.6mth Mid-ranking change
16-19 years education	3.5 grades	4.5 grades Upper third of England LA figures	0.1 grade Mid-ranking change

4. Schools programme outline

The ambition is for all schools in Sefton to participate in Poverty Proofing© audit and to change areas of policy and practice with scope for anti-poverty improvement. The expectation is that in the first round of audit (year one of two) schools would be self-selecting based on prior uptake of the universal learning offer.

Discussions with CNE have concluded that a planned approach focusing on schools and allowing time for consolidation and evaluation would give the best basis upon which to consider scope to extend the programme into other settings, e.g. pre-school/nursery, SEND settings, further education, and family Hubs.

Universal Offer: A calendar of short webinars at convenient times, e.g. lunch hour, evening, and weekend so that interested staff from schools and the Council Education team can learn about child poverty and the concept of Poverty Proofing©. Online Poverty Awareness Training lasting 1 hours 15 minutes will be delivered remotely online by Children North East.

There will be three key touch points each year with 5 dates scheduled at varying times per topic. There will be a focus on celebrating successes and looking to recruit for next round of five schools. This can be delivered alongside the delivery partner model which uses train the trainer methodology (see below).

The three topics covered in the universal training offer will be:

1. **Poverty awareness raising:** a brief introduction to the themes explored in the full Staff Training delivered in participating schools. Themes: definitions of poverty, causes and consequences of poverty, starting to think about Poverty Proofing© and inadvertent barriers that may be in education settings.

³ [Local authority gaps - Education Policy Institute \(epi.org.uk\)](https://www.epi.org.uk)

2. **Disseminating common themes** arising from the early schools' audits, discussing place specific challenges and co-creating some solutions. Staff will be given some key questions to think about. Examples of impact and promising practice will also be highlighted and shared.
3. **Reflection and What next?** – a session that will include speakers from settings where Poverty Proofing© has been delivered (where possible), sharing of promising practice, celebrations of impact that is already being seen in the different settings as well as discussions around considerations for the future.

Delivery Partner Model for schools undertaking Poverty Proofing audit and improvement activity

This begins with a **'pilot' stage**, which covers six schools. There are four elements to the schools' delivery partner model:

1. A two-day 'Train the Trainer' workshop for up to 15 staff.
2. Model of the first audit at a secondary school led by CNE staff.
3. The trained team completes five subsequent audits between them at one another's schools with support and quality assurance from CNE.
4. A review from CNE to explore common themes, impact, and future work.

There are two types of school audit, a full and an abridged version. The **abridged version** covers six areas, uses staff survey, focus groups and 1:1s with parents and governors but does not involve speaking to all pupils. One staff member in the role of delivery partner can complete information gathering in 3-5 days. Given, the competing demands on staff time and other resources in schools, our preference is to use the abridged version in this instance.

Once the pilot stage is complete, trained staff can then deliver Poverty Proofing the School Day abridged audits in other schools at a cost of **£350+VAT** per audit per school. This covers the licence fee and remote support from CNE.

5. Anticipated outputs, outcomes, impact

A logic model for the Prospects theme (appendix) has helped to identify that a Poverty Proofed© school day should,

- Reduce barriers to participation in education and curriculum enrichment activity, with greater benefit for more disadvantaged children.
- Ensure greater poverty awareness for staff and settings.
- Produce poverty sensitive policies and procedures that promote systematic change.
- Reduce stigma experienced by parents and carers and help to build trust by delivering more of the right support, earlier, more accessibly, and with greater impact.
- Minimise school costs for families, parents, and carers.
- Give parents and children a more positive experience of school.
- Stimulate cross-sector collaboration centred on the voice and lived experience of children and young people.
- Targeting of funding at school and local authority level

The reality of change can be assessed for the above using quantitative output measures, e.g. change in uptake of opportunities amongst children eligible for free school meals, as well as qualitative information, e.g. changes in school processes and procedures, and changes in beliefs and experiences reported by those directly involved.

The sum of these changes is anticipated to favour two key outcomes – the first in the near-term (in-year) and one medium-term (across years):

- Reduction in persistent absence.
- Improved educational attainment and reduction in attainment gap.

In turn, these outcomes weaken the negative effects of childhood poverty on more distant impacts, e.g. better future earning potential and long-term health, thus helping to break cycles of persistent disadvantage and deprivation.

Some possible benefits in the wider system have already been identified. For example, the opportunity to strengthen bridging relationships between different types of educational settings, or between schools in affluent and disadvantaged areas. It is also possible that the experience and benefits of this programme can be used to spark interest in other sectors and help to demystify the process of overcoming inequalities by using practical, everyday changes.

6. Poverty Proofing© arts and culture organisations

Development of a new Cultural Strategy for Sefton provides a good opportunity to review opportunities for Poverty Proofing in Arts, Culture, and events services. Alongside Children North East’s work with schools, there are also dedicated programmes for health and care settings⁴ and cultural organisations.⁵ Discussions with CNE and the relevant localities manager in Sefton have been positive, but further work is needed to finalise a setting/s.

7. Procurement, cost, and monitoring

A two-year programme of work in schools and cultural settings has been procured from CNE at a combined cost of £50 000. In line with current Contract Procedure Rules - recognising the value of the contract and status of Children North East as sole provider of this type of service, this has been arranged using a waiver process. Funding for the initial outline programme described in this report will be provided by Public Health. This will enable procurement of expert time and resources from CNE. Costs in kind by way of Council and school staff time are set out or implied by the information in this report

Elected Members and system partners will be updated and informed using Cabinet Member briefings. Formal reporting and scrutiny will be to the Children’s Board and Health and Wellbeing Board.

⁴ [Poverty Proofing© Healthcare - Children North East \(children-ne.org.uk\)](https://www.children-ne.org.uk/poverty-proofing-healthcare)

⁵ [Poverty Proofing© Culture - Children North East \(children-ne.org.uk\)](https://www.children-ne.org.uk/poverty-proofing-culture)

Appendix one: Sefton child poverty model in outline and annotated logic model for the Prospects theme

