

## Child Poverty

### Purpose of Report

1. This paper provides an update on Child Poverty in Wiltshire, including the national policy background, the data picture in Wiltshire within a national context, and the activities of the Council.

### Definition of Child Poverty

2. A child is considered to be growing up in poverty if they live in a household whose income is below 60% of the average (median) income for that year. This is called 'relative poverty'. Data on relative child poverty is available both before (BHC) and after housing costs (AHC) are taken into account.
3. The threshold for *absolute* poverty is set at 60% of the average (median) net household income in 2010/11 (as adjusted for inflation). This threshold does not fluctuate over time.

### Statistics

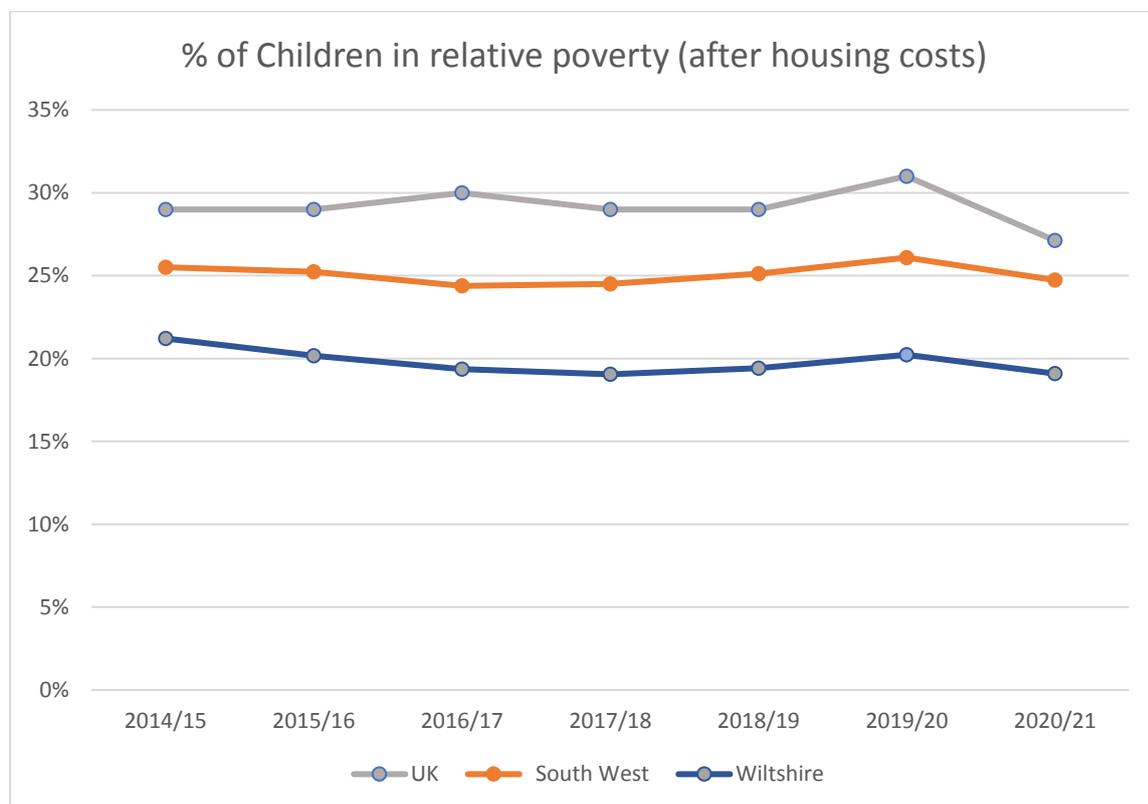


Figure 1 - source Households Below Average Income: local area estimates After Housing Costs, United Kingdom, financial years ending (FYE) 2014 to 2021 ([End Child Poverty](#)/ Loughborough University)

## Free School meals

4. A measure of free school meals is not, in itself, a direct measure of poverty but as the eligibility criteria is dependent on income related benefits it can give an indication of poverty levels. Some children in poverty will not be eligible for FSM (and conversely it should be noted that the provision of free school meals for infants is reflected in the chart below).

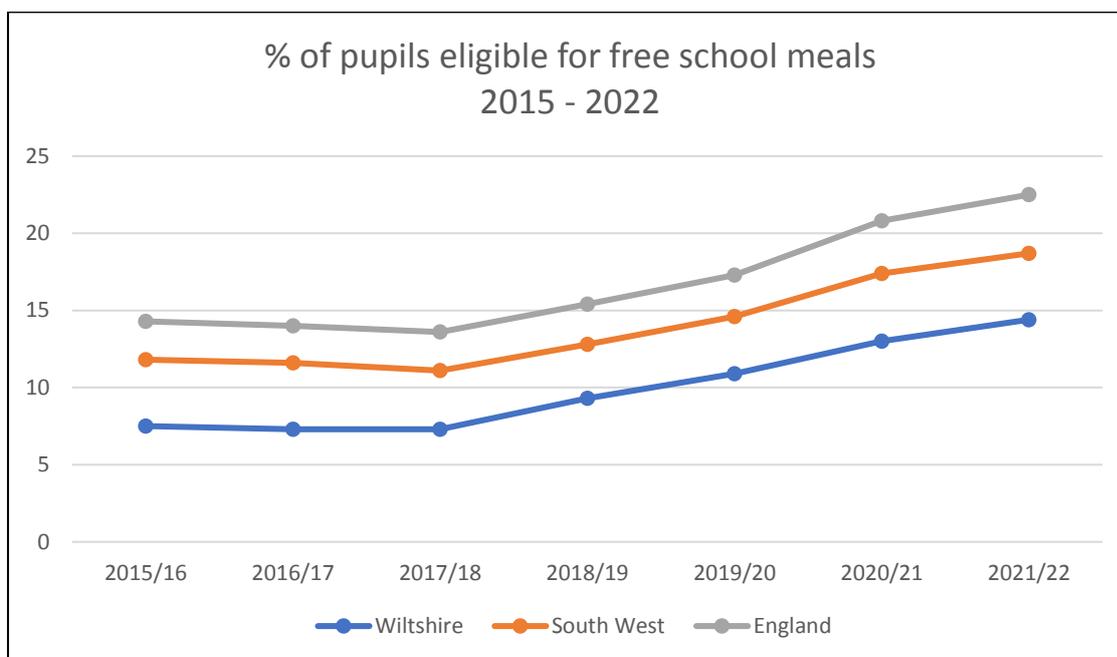


Figure 2: Source - <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/>

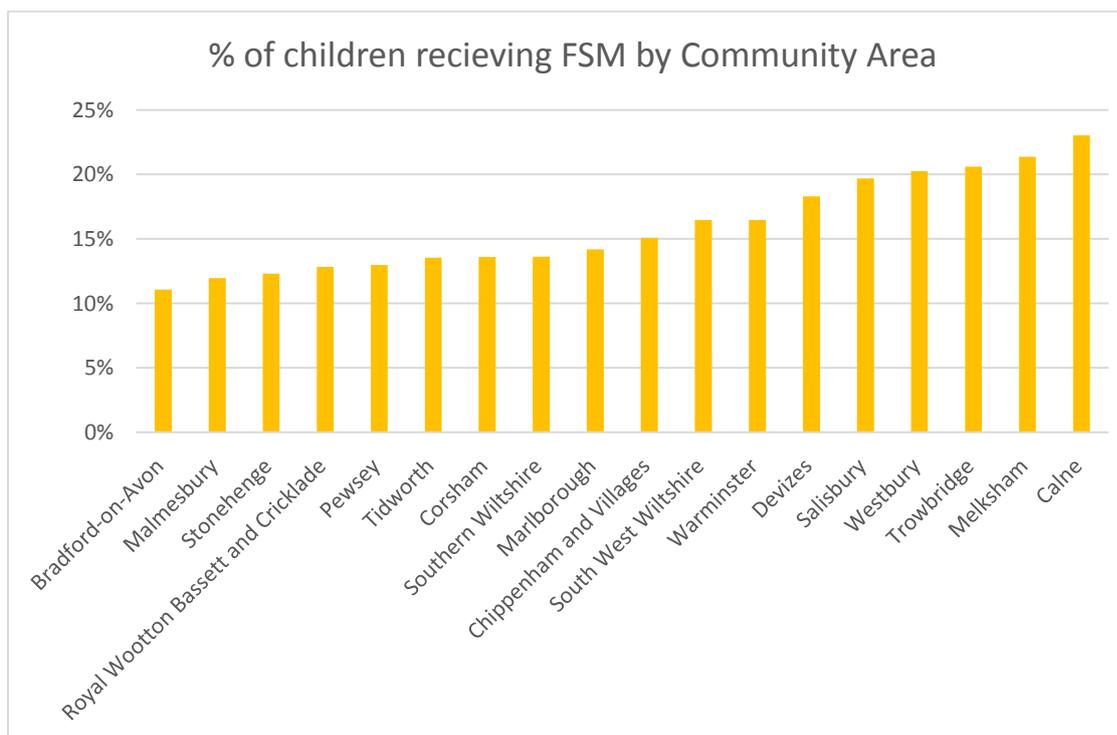


Figure 3: Source Wiltshire Council School Census Jan 2023.

## Policy Background

5. The Child Poverty Act 2010 set targets for the reduction of the percentage of children in the UK living in households with relative low income, with absolute low income, with combined low income and material deprivation and with persistent low income. The 2010 Act also placed a duty on the Secretary of State to lay before Parliament a UK strategy to reduce child poverty and to report regularly on progress; and on councils to do likewise – that is, to prepare local strategies and assessments of the needs of children living in poverty in their area.
6. The most recent version of the [reducing child poverty strategy](#) in Wiltshire (2014-2020) set out the following objectives:
  - Objective 1 – Provide effective support to vulnerable families with 0-5 year olds
  - Objective 2 – Narrowing the Educational Attainment Gap
  - Objective 3 – Develop an inclusive economy that will enable equality of economic opportunity for all
  - Objective 4 – Provide locally-focused support based on a thorough understanding of needs
  - Objective 5 – Promote engagement with the Child Poverty Strategy and related implementation plan
7. The Welfare Reform and Work Act of 2016 removed from law both the child poverty targets and the requirements to develop strategies. This change has been reflected in part 3B of the Wiltshire Council constitution, which has removed the requirements for the strategies and assessments to be approved by full council given that they are no longer required by legislation. The Children’s Select Committee has continued to receive updates on support for the early years, addressing the attainment gaps and the broader skills agenda since that time.
8. The Welfare Reform Act did continue, however, to require the Government to publish data annually on the four [income measures](#) set out in the 2010 Child Poverty Act. At the same time, government made a commitment to raise the National Living Wage (NLW) for those older than 25 to 60% of median hourly earnings by 2020. When the NLW hit that target in 2020, the Government set a [new one](#) for the NLW to reach two-thirds of median hourly earnings by 2024, for everyone over the age of 21.
9. The 2016 Act also introduced a duty for the Secretary of State to report annually on two new measures:
  - the proportion of children living in workless households and in long-term workless households; and
  - educational attainment at Key Stage 4 (England) for all children and disadvantaged children.

10. The Government viewed these new measures—described as ‘life chances’ measures in the 2016 Act—as important ways to mitigate the causes and effects of child poverty.
11. To address the first measure the government published in 2017 [Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families](#), which set out proposals to:
- launch the next phase of the Troubled Families Programme, which placed a greater emphasis on helping parents with complex needs into work
  - a new programme to reduce parental conflict
  - enhance the role of Jobcentre Plus to identify and meet complex needs
  - provide greater support to help those with drug and alcohol dependencies
12. Wiltshire is currently ranked 190 out of 201<sup>1</sup> upper-tier authorities by a measure of the percentage of workless households, and ranked 181 out of 201 by a measure of the percentage of children in workless households.
13. Alongside worklessness, nine measures were set out for [monitoring](#) including on parental mental health, parental conflict, drugs, debt and homelessness with dependent children. This reflected the increased emphasis on tackling pathways to poverty, on improving social mobility, and the findings of academic studies on [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) in the UK (Bellis et al 2014) which noted that those with four or more ACEs are at significantly higher risk of health harming behaviours later in life (set out in the box on the right hand side below). Parental separation can play a part in child poverty and is the most commonly experienced ACE (the UK has the highest rate in the developed world).

## ACE study – UK 2014

4010 adults in England were surveyed by Prof. Mark Bellis (et al).

Findings: In 100 adults in England, 48 have experienced at least one ACE (16 experiencing 2-3) during their childhood and 9 have faced 4 or more.

- 18% verbal abuse
- 15% physical abuse
- 6% sexual abuse
- 24% parental separation
- 10% alcohol misuse / 4% drug misuse
- 12% mental health in household
- 24% separation/divorce in household
- 4% person in household incarcerated

- 3 x report lower levels of mental wellbeing
- 2 x currently binge drink and have a poor diet
- 3 x a current smoker
- 5 x sex while under 16 years old, and 6 x unplanned teenage pregnancy
- 7 x involved in violence in the last year
- 11 x misused substances (including heroin/crack) or have been incarcerated

Source: Bellis et al, 2014

<sup>1</sup> A workless household is a household that includes at least one person aged 16 to 64 where no-one aged 16 or over is in employment. Ranking data measured 2017-2021  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/datasets/rankingsofpercentagesofworklesshouseholdsforcountiesandunitaryauthorityareasingreatbritaintable>

14. In 2017 the government also published [Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential](#) - a plan for improving social mobility through education. The plan outlined several ambitions:
- Ambition 1: Close the 'word gap' in the early years
  - Ambition 2: Close the attainment gap in school while continuing to raise standards for all
  - Ambition 3: High quality post-16 education choices for all young people
  - Ambition 4: Everyone achieving their potential in rewarding careers
15. The plan set out two principles for working: identifying and spreading 'what works', through the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF); and building lasting success through partnership. These ambitions were to be delivered through a range of actions such as: developing toolkits for health visitors; developing performance dashboards to show what is happening in each local authority; identifying communities with low take-up of early education – particularly for disadvantaged children; £50m to create more high quality school-based nursery provision for disadvantaged children; introducing smarter incentives to train, attract and retain the best teachers in challenging areas; developing and increase the take-up of degree apprenticeships in disadvantaged areas.
16. The latest figures reported for the [Child Poverty/ Welfare Reform](#) Acts show that across the UK over the last decade the proportion of children in workless households has fallen, levels of parental conflict are stable, those with one parent with symptoms of anxiety/ depression have increased, substance misuse is stable, problem debt has reduced, those with a good level of development on free school meals has increased (but fallen back since the pandemic to a greater extent than other children), the disadvantage attainment gap has fallen (but increased since the pandemic) and the level of NEETs has fallen (but increased since the pandemic). Over the last couple of decades relative poverty has remained broadly stable and absolute poverty has decreased (though not as quickly as it has for other population groups such as pensioners).
17. The Social Mobility Commission (with its title amended to remove 'child poverty' by the Welfare Reform Act) has been developing its [social mobility index](#) to reflect an increased emphasis on not just geographical disparities but the drivers of social mobility, intermediate outcomes and mobility outcomes later in life. New local level data reflecting this approach is expected to be available in September this year.

## Recent Activities

18. *Household Support Fund (HSF)*: Wiltshire Council was allocated £5,457,313 from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Fund is being provided to support households, who would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential utility bills or meet other essential living costs to help them with significantly rising living costs for the financial year 2023-24.

19. The Fund should primarily be used to support energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking, or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, as well as for sanitary purposes and sewerage. Energy bills may be of particular concern to low-income households during the period of the Fund.
20. The Fund can also be used to support households with the cost of food and essential costs related to energy, food and water such as warm clothing, blankets, the purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers. The Fund can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this need.
21. The Fund can be used to support wider essential needs not linked to energy and water should Authorities consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle, or paying for fuel. The Fund may be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice, where Authorities consider this appropriate.
22. The greatest allocation in the previous rounds of the fund has been focused on helping to provide free school meals to eligible families during school holidays, and support to households on a low income where the residents are over 65 years of age.
23. *Funding for Nursery Places for 2-year-olds:* The Early Years Entitlements Team work very closely with providers and parents, to ensure that the majority of eligible parents access a funded place. Wiltshire have had a consistently good uptake and the work of health visitors and children's centres services in promoting the funding supports this continued success.
24. *FUEL (Food, Unity, Energy, Laughter):* The council has been delivering the Holiday Activity and Food programme, known locally as FUEL during the Easter holidays and this will continue in the Summer and Christmas school holidays in 2023. The FUEL programme is funded by the Department of Education and will deliver camps in ten areas across the county where there is the greatest level of need. At FUEL camps children receive a nutritious lunch each day and are given the opportunity to take part in a range of practical, physical and hands on activities including robotics workshops, circus skills, sporting sessions, Olympic kit, talent shows, and arts and crafts.
25. *Healthy Start Programme:* The national [Healthy Start](#) scheme can help those eligible to buy healthy foods and receive free vitamins to give children the best start in life. The scheme is promoted in Wiltshire via key early years partners such as children's centres, maternity services, health visiting and early years settings.
26. Healthy Start is for children under the age of four and pregnant women/people only, who could get:

- £4.25 each week of their pregnancy (from the 10th week of your pregnancy)
- £8.50 each week for children under 1
- £4.25 each week for children between the age of 1 and below 4 years old

27. Free vitamins are also available with Healthy Start card (via Children’s Centres)

28. In addition, Healthy Start awareness training has been delivered to Wiltshire Warm and Safe staff, the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and Boater outreach team and primary care. In April 2023, out of the 2917 families eligible for Healthy Start, 62% made a claim. Despite the upward trend this year for the uptake of Healthy Start work still continues to further promote the scheme and support eligible families to make a claim.

29. Based on current most recent figures, 1,794 families in Wiltshire received support under the scheme out of 2,917 eligible – a rate of 62% with the rate for South West region being 64%.

<b>Wiltshire 2023 healthy Start uptake</b>			
<b>Month / year</b>	<b>Total Entitled Beneficiaries</b>	<b>Total Eligible Beneficiaries</b>	<b>% uptake</b>
Jan-23	1726	2949	59
Feb-23	1750	2950	59
Mar-23	1762	2943	60
Apr-23	1794	2917	62

30. *Wider Cost of Living Response*: Regular briefings have been given to the Cabinet regarding on the response to Cost of Living issues. The latest update can be [read here](#), including information about:

- Support in Libraries
- The interactive [Community Directory](#) (including food banks)
- Work of Area Boards

31. *Supporting Families Programme*: The programme has now been running for over a decade, previously named the Trouble Families programme, provides targeted interventions for families with complex interconnected problems including unemployment, poor school attendance, mental and physical health problems, involvement in crime and antisocial behaviour, domestic abuse, and children in need of help and protection. The Select Committee have received updates on the programme previously, and the Governments recent 10 year review can be read [here](#).

32. A wider range of relevant activity continues on skills, attainment and support for the early years on which the committee has received separate updates at recent meetings and a separate item provides an update on the service delivery plan for the children and families service which includes a range of relevant activity.

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