Action on Poverty and Hardship in the Potteries

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Abstract:	Reflecting on anti-poverty work within Stoke-on-Trent from a variety of academic perspectives, this special edition offers a place-based examination of action on poverty and hardship that seeks to link local, creative, place-based solutions to national and international anti-poverty agendas. Each article links to how the author(s) contribute to action on poverty and hardship in the potteries and reflects on national, place based anti-poverty perspectives. The special edition holds key themes around the need for place-based longitudinal investment, the imperative to work with communities, foregrounding the knowledge held by lived experience. In conclusion, Stoke-on-Trent is a community in which many of the authors live, all of whom work and one in which Gratton (2020) articulates that the University has made an institutional commitment to work in partnership with to address poverty. The articles also demonstrate that academics working in collaboration with the anti-poverty sector including people with lived and learned experience and alongside students can achieve positive change in a city, with recognition that more can be done locally to transform lives, neighbourhoods, transport routes and wider societal economic and well-being reform.

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Post Conference Special Issue. 'Action on Poverty and Hardship in the Potteries'

Introduction to the Special Edition

Goldstraw,K and Page,S

This special edition of the Journal of Local Economy is focussed on Action on Poverty and Hardship in the Potteries. The special issue draws on a range of local and national expertise which emerged from an Action on Poverty and Hardship Conference held in Stoke-on-Trent in June 2022 and wider partnership working initiatives. Stoke-on-Trent is a post-industrial city, home of the once thriving potteries industry and a creative hub for the region. Post-industrial cities can have higher mortality rates, which can correlate with people being engaged in riskier unhealthy behaviours (van der Pol, Walsh and McCartney, 2015). Stoke-on-Trent has acknowledged health and social inequality challenges (Hurst et al, 2012; Murray and Leighton, 2008; MacLeod and Jones, 2018) and is the sixteenth most deprived area in England, with child poverty rates sitting at 43% (Etherington, 2021). The citywide deprivation issues are one of the reasons that historically the city was awarded a health action zone to address health and social inequalities (Goldstraw and Page, forthcoming). Sadly, such government initiatives were short lived, but a legacy of change activism towards tackling poverty lives on in the city today, which is reflected across the articles in this special edition. With the cost of living increasing and welfare rates being insufficient to meet basic needs in families in the UK (May et al, 2020) and employment incomes in Stoke-on-Trent being less than average, and the further exacerbation of the negative legacy of the pandemic continuing to bite (Etherington et al, 2021), it is no wonder that city resources are strained and in need of levelling-up uplift. Stoke-on-Trent is a well utilised dispersal area for asylum seekers in the UK (Sturge, 2019) and dispersal areas are more commonly recognised as impoverished (Easton and Butcher, 2018; Cruddas, 2007; Zetter and Pearl, 1999). Whilst the city has positive green spaces (Gidlow, Ellis and Bostock, 2012), it had also been named by the World Health Organisation in 2014 in the top ten places in England for unsafe levels of air pollution (The Sentinel, 2016), which has implications for life expectancy. Recently, in receipt levelling up funding (Etherington, Jones and Telford, 2022) the city has emerging opportunities within its post-industrial challenges. This special issue examines solutions, activism and creative approaches to addressing community hardship, providing a place-based examination of action on poverty and hardship that seeks to link local, creative, place-based solutions to national and international anti-poverty agendas. Each article is linked to how the authors contribute to action on poverty and hardship in the potteries and reflects on national, place based anti-poverty perspectives.

The special edition begins with a 'viewpoint' article by Associate Professor Nicola Gratton, which discusses the civic contribution of Staffordshire University. In the UK, many Universities are situated in close proximity to local communities and whilst some engage in the civic agenda to address poverty issues, others are less engaged with the issues most affecting local communities. This viewpoint piece uses Staffordshire University as a case study to illustrate how universities can play a full and active role in addressing issues of hardship. Universities have social capital and knowledge which gives them a place of positional power, which can both help, or hinder, processes to tackling poverty. Gratton argues that for universities to be able to make a difference to hardship they need to be aware of the underlying causes of hardship and challenge

the power structures that create them, including their own. This viewpoint piece provides examples of a number of university wide initiatives and projects to highlight what has worked and what has worked less well in Stoke-on-Trent. Examples include how storytelling and creative and digital engagement can draw on University knowledge and expertise to raise awareness of hardship and build momentum for positive change. In order to be a civic university, committed to tackling local inequality and poverty issues, university's need to take risks and leave the campus to embed themselves in public and community spaces so that those affected by hardship can access University resources. Universities must also build strategic relationships and partnerships to have greater impact than what can be achieved in silo. Universities need to respect and value the contributions of lived experience experts in the process. Crucially, Gratton explores how working with communities to address issues of hardship is as much about how we do things as what we do.

Our second viewpoint article is written by Dr Paul Barratt, a Geography Senior Lecturer at Staffordshire University and a former Professor at Staffordshire University, Dr Ruth Swetnam, who is now the Carbon and Research Manager for the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts. The piece explores how to overcome commuting access challenges for students, community members and staff with regards to application of the 15-minute city concept by encouraging sustainable travel options. The 15-minute campus facilitates civic contributions in reducing carbon emissions and advocates for the University to contend with spaces within and beyond the campus. For a city that has had previous poor air quality impinging on life expectancy (Lundie, 2020), sustainable travel options provide a desirable option. As such, the project aims to facilitate the enhancement of high-quality public transport and increase activity on travel networks. In turn this would reduce private vehicle usage. This paper evaluates the 15-minute campus and the positive impacts upon students, staff and community members, with recognition that students on limited resources may welcome more cost-effective sustainable travel options. By mapping and evaluating the 15-minute offer from the student perspective, well-being impacts are noted.

The first peer-reviewed feature article is written by Research Associate Fiona McCormack from the Centre for Health and Development and Sophia Fedorowicz (Sophia is also the research and evaluation lead at Expert Citizens CIC) on women and multiple disadvantage. Public health research tells us that people in poverty are likely to be experiencing multiple issues pertaining to housing, education and access to support services (Dalgren and Whitehead, 1991). McCormack and Fedorowitz's paper specifically focused on the experiences of women who have housing need and a further need(s), which puts them into the classification of experiencing 'multiple disadvantage'. All of the women in this study were based in Stoke-on-Trent at the time of the research. The paper draws on two qualitative studies which were undertaken in collaboration with lived experience expertise and as such, this is a participatory research project with co-produced findings and recommendations, including how to reduce barriers for women in accessing local support services and safe accommodation. The article argues that women need safe spaces to process the issues they face and safe accommodation in order to address wider health and social inequalities.

The second peer-reviewed feature article is by Dr Katy Goldstraw, a Senior Lecturer in Health and Social Care. This paper reflects upon co-designing anti-poverty curricula in association with Staffordshire University Centre of Learning and Pedagogic Practice. Goldstraw evaluates the

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co-production work of the Action on Poverty and Hardship Degree Steering group, which Goldstraw initiated. The Steering Group brought together academics, students and local and national VCS leaders to co-design anti-poverty curriculum. This aligns with the University Academic Strategy regarding integrating academic integrity into innovative curriculum design. Goldstraw reflects on how co-produced place-based approaches to curriculum development facilitates course content that reaches a wider audience than those in a classroom. The Action on Poverty and Hardship degree at Staffordshire University was a product of eighteen months of steering group activity aimed at recruiting and supporting students from low-income backgrounds to become engaged in anti-poverty activism. Goldstraw reflects on best practice in co-produced curriculum development and the importance of securing bursaries from the sector for low-income students in order for them to engage in education and activism. Ultimately, the HE sector has a role to play in equipping activists and leaders in the Anti-Poverty sector.

The third peer-reviewed feature article is by Professor David Etherington and Professor Martin Jones from Staffordshire University and Dr Luke Telford from York University. It evaluates the impacts of the Covid Crisis and austerity measures on 'left behind' cities, utilising a case study approach from Stoke on Trent data. The article discusses how multiple crisis's can negatively impact upon deprivation, with recognition of the amalgamated effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 'cost of living' upsurge and de-industrialisation, which reveals intensified social inequalities. Deindustrialisation and 'job destruction' impinges of individual, city and national economic performance and in 'left behind' places this negatively impacts upon living standards. Austerity has impacted areas over this past decade and has resulted in significant cuts to welfare (May et al, 2020) and local government services, resulting in significant levels of poverty and destitution. Etherington, Jones and Telford provide a theoretical framework for analysing austerity neoliberalism and provide a tool for exploring and understanding its impact on Stoke-on-Trent. This paper draws on unique qualitative and quantitative data and notes the city-region experiencing a 'structural cocktail' of poverty and disadvantage, including low paid jobs, welfare erosion, indebtedness, destitution, and food insecurity. The authors close by discussing the implications of these structural problems for Government policy including a commentary on employment and skills policies and the Levelling Up agenda.

The fourth peer-reviewed feature article is by Senior Lecturer in Criminology and also Action on Poverty, Sarah Page, and is based on the poverty experienced by asylum seekers based in Stoke-on-Trent that were required to bail report in Salford. The article provides an overview of research that led to change activism in support of asylum seeker rights for those based in Stoke-on-Trent. Research interviews with 19 people working in a paid or unpaid capacity with, or on behalf of asylum seekers at operational and strategic levels, provided evidence of significant issues faced by asylum seekers based on the Government moving bail reporting to a more regional basis in 2018. Poor mental health, trauma, racism, poverty, safeguarding and children's education were exacerbated by changes to reporting proceedings. Evidence also demonstrated the changes to reporting arrangements led to resource implications for local services in Stoke-on-Trent, with advocation for greater Home Office investment into dispersal areas and for the reinstatement of localised reporting or tele-communication reporting. This paper provides examples of how the interview evidence was used to influence change to enable asylum seekers in Stoke-on-Trent with mental health challenges to again report locally through telecommunications from Citizens Advice to the Home Office.

The final article is an 'in-perspective' article by Associate Professor Anna Francis, who draws on place-based practice to consider an alternative model for developing long term approaches to creative community development and regenerate urbans spaces. Francis specialises in professional arts practitioners, facilitating public-participatory art, within community development and urban regeneration initiatives. Her research notes that this has led to specific types of impact: fostering community development and cohesion in underprivileged areas of Stoke-on-Trent; influencing local government policy; and developing new initiatives and cultures in social arts organizations. This paper focuses on the development of The Portland Inn Project (since 2015), which provides a creative artist and community led regeneration initiative to a deprived urban area of Stoke-on-Trent. The project has facilitated community members to make positive changes and have their views captured in area developments. In 2021, The Portland Inn Project has developed thinking and action around the development of a Community Led 100-year plan for the neighbourhood. This paper pushes funders and policy makers to think beyond short term planning and funding cycles. The 100-year plan borrows from landscape architecture and design thinking to empower communities, funders and policy makers to resist short term planning and to instead develop a more holistic and sustainable approach to allow for legacy in the benefits of change at the social, political and environmental level.

Reflecting on anti-poverty work within Stoke-on-Trent from a variety of academic perspectives, this special edition offers a place-based examination of action on poverty and hardship that seeks to link local, creative, place-based solutions to national and international anti-poverty agendas. Each article links to how the author(s) contribute to action on poverty and hardship in the potteries and reflects on national, place based anti-poverty perspectives. The special edition holds key themes around the need for place-based longitudinal investment, the imperative to work with communities, foregrounding the knowledge held by lived experience. In conclusion, Stoke-on-Trent is a community in which many of the authors live, all of whom work and one in which Gratton (2020) articulates that the University has made an institutional commitment to work in partnership with to address poverty. The articles also demonstrate that academics working in collaboration with the anti-poverty sector including people with lived and learned experience and alongside students can achieve positive change in a city, with recognition that more can be done locally to transform lives, neighbourhoods, transport routes and wider societal economic and well-being reform.

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