

# Finding solutions:

## Equipping churches in the North East



Annual Report

April 2025 – March 2026



Church Action  
on Poverty  
North East

## Introduction

Church Action on Poverty North East recognises that financial hardship stems from complex, long-term challenges that demand a coordinated response across public, private and voluntary sectors. Partnership working is proving vital, enabling churches to contribute meaningfully, offering community insight, compassion and a commitment to lasting change. Through engagement with local initiatives and collaboration, we remain informed, resourced and equipped to support action on poverty and inequality, both locally and beyond.

## Annual Meeting 2025

Our speaker at last year's Annual Meeting was Amanda Bailey, Director of the North East Child Poverty Commission. Amanda is based at School of Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University. She spoke about how we all wanted every child to have the best start in life but that growing up in poverty results in



restricted choices, opportunities and less ability to participate fully in society. The result is that far too many children and young people across the North East are being held back from fulfilling their potential, an injustice which is holding our region back.

The CAPNE annual report was presented – *Hope and Reality*. The following people were elected officers Bernadette Askins (Chair), Fr Chris Hughes (Deputy Chair): Rev David Peel (Finance Officer)..

There was also a panel discussion (pictured left), in which people shared their personal experiences of poverty and insights for what might change.

## Future plans

### Child Poverty Reduction Summit

Mayor Kim McGuinness (North East Combined Authority) is hosting a Child Poverty Reduction Summit on 9 July at the Vertu Motors Arena, Newcastle. CAPNE has been allocated three places, enabling regional church leaders to contribute to discussions. Rev Kim Money (URC Northern Synod) is coordinating attendance.

### Meeting with NE Combined Authority Cabinet Member for Poverty

CAPNE is planning a meeting with Cllr Tracey Dixon (*right*), cabinet member for poverty, to share concerns about the impact of poverty on communities. Church leaders will highlight their frontline work and seek to understand the NE Combined Authority's strategy, exploring opportunities for partnership to strengthen future action.



### From Access to Action Workshop

Church Action on Poverty worker, Jen Brown (*right*), has offered to run a free, one day training course for workers running church-related community action projects in the region.

The workshop will explore participatory ways of working to enable the people who use projects play a more active part. It will be a practical course on what participation is and how to apply it in their own context. Let us know if you are interested.



## Listening to Lived Experience: Poverty Action Week Consultation



As part of Poverty Action Week 2025, Church Action on Poverty North East held a consultation at the Cedarwood Centre on October 9th, bringing together people with lived experience with community organisations and churches to reflect on the reality of their lives.

Participants spoke about injustices they face, highlighting stigma and a lack of understanding, particularly towards those on low incomes, asylum seekers and people experiencing homelessness. Participants said that poverty was often misunderstood. Stereotypes are used to mask the real effects

on peoples' lives of insecure housing, rising costs and limited opportunities. Rural challenges, including isolation and poor transport, were also raised.

Contributors called for greater inclusion in shaping solutions and identified root causes such as lack of empathy, accountability and lived experience in decision-making. While the experiences shared (particularly by Joe's Place members) highlighted hunger, debt and poor mental health, there was also a strong message of hope: change is possible through local action, stronger communities and meaningful participation.

## Community responses to poverty

The South Tyneside Poverty Truth Commission began in 2023, with a facilitator recruiting community commissioners who have lived experience of poverty. The commissioner's role is to share their stories with local decision makers, to create lasting change. The Commission was launched on 4 November 2025, when commissioners spoke to an audience of 100 people about their experiences. The next stage involves civic commissioners—local decision makers—building relationships with community commissioners. Together, they will identify key issues and develop practical, locally focused solutions. Real change must be achievable, community-led, and shaped by the voices of those who live with poverty in South Tyneside.

**Lesley Armour, South Tyneside Poverty Truth Commission Facilitator**

## Church Action on Poverty: national context

During the past year, Church Action on Poverty nationally has focused on building stronger partnerships with its core supporters: churches across the UK, and the nationwide network of Your Local Pantry affordable food projects. With over 102 Pantries nationwide (including three in Newcastle), Church Action on Poverty is now exploring how the thousands of Pantry members can become agents of change in their Pantries, their communities, and the wider world. Meanwhile, Church Action on Poverty is partnering with churches in new ways, for example through the 'From Access to Action' training (see page 2) or through the '26 in 26' poster and upcoming *Just Church* programme, which will help churches to celebrate their work to tackle poverty and to explore ways of deepening their commitment.



## Some members' activities

Members make valuable contributions to their communities and draw strength from the support of the wider group. Our diverse experiences and resources mean we can enable and equip each other and churches, to support people with lived experience of poverty, in the pursuit of justice and equality.

**Jim Robertson** contributes to the Gateshead Tackling Poverty Partnership, recognising poverty as a complex, deep-rooted issue. He is active in the "Participation and Voice" group, ensuring lived experience informs decision-making, and is also involved in similar work in Northumberland. In Gateshead, 32,899 households (36.6%) live on incomes below £25,000, with many in deep poverty. In Northumberland, Jim's work highlights rural challenges, including access to services, education, skills and affordable transport.

**Roger Gordon** supports outreach at North Shields Methodist Church, working closely with partner organisations. The church hosts Giggles, a weekly group for mums and babies and maintains strong links with Methodist Homes through regular brunch, breakfast and activity clubs.

It also runs a dementia support group for individuals and carers, fostering social connection and creativity. Occasional community meals are well attended and an annual Poverty Sunday service uses national Church Action on Poverty resources.

**Chris Hughes** represents Hexham & Newcastle Diocese within Tyne and Wear Citizens. A recent listening campaign ahead of local elections identified key concerns including the cost of living, access to good work, isolation, SEND provision, community safety and NHS dentistry. A delegates' assembly set campaign priorities, followed by candidate assemblies promoting dialogue and accountability. Citizens UK was a beneficiary of The Guardian's 2025 Christmas Appeal, raising over £1 million and highlighting community organising in the region.

**Bernadette Askins** represents Churches Together South Tyneside on the South Tyneside Poverty Action Group, supporting collaboration and sharing information with local churches on issues such as Household Support Grants, and funeral and furniture poverty. She has also contributed to consultations on barriers to physical activity for older people. At St Gregory's Church, she supports an Outreach Group, helping deliver children's activities and distributing 450 food bags through the Love Christmas project, with support from the wider community including 60 volunteers.

**David Peel** has long supported offenders and ex-offenders, recognising the strong links between poverty and imprisonment. While individuals are responsible for their actions, many in prison have experienced significant disadvantage. Over the past year, David has supported four men in prison and one rebuilding life after a forensic psychiatric unit. CAPNE continues to highlight the systemic issues behind incarceration, recognising that prison conditions reflect wider societal challenges and the need for change.

**Joanne Thorns** works with Communities Together Durham (CTD), supporting the Diocese of Durham's poverty strategy. She partners with churches to deliver projects including holiday clubs, debt advice, food provision and social isolation initiatives, alongside training and theological reflection. CTD recently hosted a Food Summit exploring alternatives to food banks and runs regular practitioner networks. Joanne leads refugee and asylum support through regional drop-ins and is active in Citizens Tyne and Wear, campaigning for the Real Living Wage and fair school costs.