

# A STATEMENT FROM THRIVE TEESSIDE

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Stockton-on-Tees is home to many individuals possessing wisdom, knowledge, resilience, selflessness and a strong sense of community spirit. These admirable traits, however, are often obscured by common misconceptions, ignorance and stigma. As a charity based in the constituency of Stockton North, Thrive Teesside has spent many years challenging poverty, aiding the community and empowering those with lived experience to speak truth to power. As such, we are appalled by the language used in the House of Commons on Wednesday 22nd November by the Home Secretary, James Cleverly MP.

Stockton North is a fantastic community, however it suffers high levels of poverty and inequality. Thrive Teesside understands that poverty is a complex social, economic and political issue. It has long lasting impacts on families, communities and society and drives inequality in education, health, employment and much more. We appreciate the effort of our local MP Alex Cunningham who attempted to raise awareness and press for answers and actions to improve these statistics on child poverty, by asking the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak for an explanation as the leader of the governing party why poverty persists.

We are dismayed that audio suggests that Stockton was described as being a “shithole”. But more worrying is the suggestion implicit in this response is that this explains why 1 in 3 children in Stockton live in poverty. We understand that after initially denying making any comment, James Cleverly MP has attempted to clarify that his remarks were aimed at Alex Cunningham MP, rather than the town of Stockton-on-Tees. Regardless of this clarification, we are disappointed and disconcerted that the Home Secretary has overlooked the crucial issue of entrenched and continued inequality and poverty in the North East of England. A third of children in our community are unable to ignore the poverty that harms their daily lives. Our experience and work indicates that the ongoing budget cuts, lack of funding, and lack of opportunity have been exacerbated in recent years.

We would expect for the Home Secretary, James Cleverly MP to give a full apology for the insulting language and acknowledging the hurt caused. In addition to an apology for this derogatory language we would welcome a discussion on the causes of poverty in Stockton and to work with parliament in developing solutions to eradicating it. We believe that the best way to learn and positively move forward is for those most directly affected by poverty to be listened to and worked alongside those with the power to change priorities and policy.