Looking forward, and with a new child poverty strategy for 2014 to 2017, further research using later waves of data from Understanding Society will help policy makers, researchers and campaigners monitor the effects of poverty reduction strategies, assess how much money matters compared to other factors and whether the broader approach proposed by the Government is beginning to make a difference.

Further information and resources
Find out more about the project
www.demos.co.uk/poverty/index

Read the *Poverty in Perspective* report
www.demos.co.uk/publications/povertyinperspective

Pilot studies involving three local councils, Camden, Wakefield and Wirral have already shown the value of using the toolkit approach in a local context.

Child Poverty Strategy in consultation at time of going to press: *www.gov.uk/government/ consultations/child-poverty-a-draft-strategy.*

If you would like a more detailed briefing on this research or to discuss commissioning research using Understanding Society email info@understandingsociety.ac.uk

This case study is part of a series aimed at potential users of Understanding Society data, including: policy makers, researchers and people in a position to influence social policy. If you are using data from Understanding Society and would like to profile your work, please email info@understandingsociety.ac.uk

Understanding Society

Local approaches to tackling poverty

Using Understanding Society to explore the lived experiences of those in poverty

One of the most pressing problems facing governments around the world is how to tackle poverty. But poverty is multi-dimensional, affecting many different groups. The Poverty in Perspective research project aims to offer more differentiated insights to turn around lives.

The UK Government is committed to eradicating child poverty by 2020 and yet experts predict that one in four children, about 3.4 million, will be in relative poverty by the end of the decade. More than half of those children are likely to be living in households where at least one adult is in work.

In 2012 the Government launched a consultation process to develop a better measurement of child poverty that reflects reality and therefore can help to tackle the root causes of poverty.

In response to the consultation, a team of researchers from NatCen and the think tank Demos, in association with the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, used Understanding Society to accurately describe the experience of poverty in the UK today. The project is called *Poverty in Perspective* and aims to build a better understanding of poverty in Britain, by looking more closely at the lived experience of those in poverty.

Demos argues that understanding the different lived experiences of those in poverty is fundamental to tackling it. Without this insight it is difficult to develop practical solutions that can help turn around lives now. *Poverty in Perspective* not only challenges preconceptions of poverty, but has also developed a toolkit to help councils, charities and other organisations to better identify different types of poverty, and to tailor their services more effectively.

Key Findings
The research identifies 20 'indicators' of poverty, from housing, health and education to employment and family support. By mapping these indicators onto the low-income population, researchers are able to see how they cluster together for different low income households. Particular combinations of these indicators are used to identify 15 different 'types' of poverty across three groups.

• Working age with dependant children
• Working age without children
• Pensioners

This shows that the needs of young single mothers with babies or young children, for example, are quite different from very large households containing multiple adults and children or single pensioners, with high level of physical health problems, living on their own.

A toolkit, which has been piloted by a number of councils, provides a series of steps to guide policy makers and practitioners' thinking around each type of poverty. It suggests following a five-stage process that involves using the poverty group typology to identify the type of poverty experienced by a particular household and to decide on the range of existing and/or new services that need to be mobilised to meet the needs of that household.

Paul Hayes, Corporate Policy Manager from Wakefield Council has used the toolkit and says "The toolkit, and looking at different types of household poverty, will certainly help shape and inform our approach to dealing with it. It will help us target – targeting will become increasingly important for public agencies and voluntary agencies especially given limited resources, to ensure that the money we spend is on the right people and on the right things."
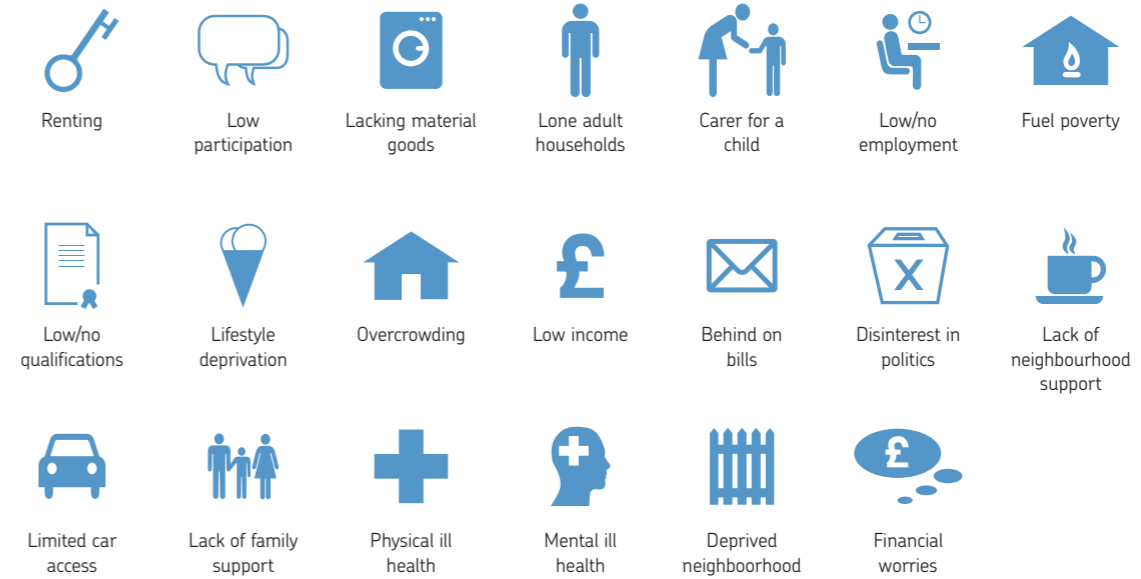
The research project
By looking more closely at the lived experience of those in poverty, the project represents a major step-change in how poverty is understood. Its primary aim is to enable policymakers and practitioners to move away from a 'one size fits all' approach to tackling poverty and see it for what it is: a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon, which manifests itself in different ways in different households.

The findings – and the model we have used to generate them – are entirely new. The report challenges established preconceptions about life in poverty, but also has vitally important implications for how we tackle it.

Claudia Wood, Director, Demos

THE 20 INDICATORS OF POVERTY

| Renting | Low participation | Lacking material goods | Lone adult households | Carer for a child | Low/no employment | Fuel poverty |

| Low/no qualifications | Lifestyle deprivation | Overcrowding | Low income | Behind on bills | Disinterest in politics | Lack of neighbourhood support |

| Limited car access | Lack of family support | Physical ill health | Mental ill health | Deprived neighbourhood | Financial worries |

20 Indicators: Demos/Henrietta Ross

Using data from the first wave of Understanding Society, households with low incomes were selected. A set of 20 commonly accepted poverty indicators (above) were also selected following reviews from academic articles, and input from the public, experts and practitioners in the field.

By applying these indicators to households in poverty, the analysis generated clusters of groups of households with similar features. This analysis was supported by in-depth interviews with 30 poor households – focusing on those of working age with dependent children – to give greater insight into the everyday experience of poverty.

There were several advantages to using the Understanding Society data:
• the large sample drawn from the low-income population
• detail on all sources of household income
• comparable data held for each household in the study
• questions which examine the wider aspects of living in poverty; material deprivation, housing, socialising, parent's education and health.

Policy implications
Poverty in Perspective develops an entirely new way of thinking about poverty, revealing how poverty exists in different ways in different households. It shows that those in poverty are not a homogeneous group that can all be supported in the same way.

This new research makes a major contribution to the Government's expressed aim of developing a new multidimensional poverty measure. The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission has also now called for "a richer view of 'current experience' of poverty by allying dimensions about 'poverty now' (eg, debt, housing) with the existing relative income-based measures in the Child Poverty Act 2010".

At the same time, the research has created a process (the toolkit) to support local authorities and other agencies as they seek to identify and tackle the multiple layers of poverty at a local level. The approach to tackling poverty based on delivering high quality integrated services, preferred by some, crucially depends on better evidence.

By mapping these 20 indicators onto the low-income population, Demos were able to see how they clustered together for different low income households.

This complex, multi-dimensional landscape sheds light on the nature of poverty in Britain today and, crucially, provides a basis for a more nuanced, tailored approach to tackling it on the ground.

It is increasingly clear that poverty is not about income alone.

Iain Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for Welfare and Pensions, speaking in 2012