

Children & Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2 December 2015

Welfare Reform & Poverty Issues



Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with background information concerning the consultation on the draft County Durham poverty action plan attached as Appendix 2 which includes a number of activities relating to Child Poverty.
2. As part of the quarterly performance monitoring the committee receives information on child poverty in County Durham and members have expressed concern in relation to child poverty.

Context

3. Due to the scale of welfare reform and its potential impact on families and communities in the county, regular updates on policy implications and their impacts have been prepared for Members and shared with partners.
4. Durham County Council (DCC) Members received at the Cabinet meeting on the 21 October, 2015 an update on the government's welfare reform programme and related policies affecting residents in the county together with a draft County Durham poverty action plan which builds a more comprehensive response to the changes to welfare and the wider poverty issues within the county.
5. Arrangements have been made for the Head of Policy and Communications to attend committee on the 2 December, 2015 to provide Members with an overview of the draft County Durham poverty action plan. The presentation will focus on:
 - Background and current position re welfare reform and poverty
 - Actions to date
 - The way forward

Draft Poverty Action Plan

6. It is difficult to distinguish between changes resulting from welfare reform, economic trends associated with recession and recovery and underlying issues including poverty. For this reason, the Council agreed to widen the response to welfare reform led by Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive, to include addressing those aspects of poverty that can be tackled locally. A poverty action plan has been developed and a draft is attached. This includes proposed actions to:
 - a) raise awareness of poverty within the Council and amongst our partners;
 - b) get our services and partners to understand poverty and how we can all work together to help address it;
 - c) establish ways of monitoring how people are affected by poverty; what other issues result from poverty; and what gaps in support exist that can be addressed within the resources available;
 - d) focus closely on child poverty, issues surrounding credit and debt, fuel poverty, the impact of further changes to welfare and benefits, and initiatives to help people work.
7. In order to focus on the actions necessary to respond to the challenges facing the county's residents, the draft poverty action plan has been developed on five key themes:
 - a) attitudes to poverty and raising its profile;
 - b) focus on child poverty;
 - c) credit and debt;
 - d) further welfare reform and benefit changes;
 - e) work and personal wellbeing and sense of worth.
8. At the Cabinet meeting on the 21st October it was agreed to consult upon the draft poverty action plan with a range of stakeholders.
9. The consultation taking place with partners provides an opportunity to comment and contributes to the further development of the plan. This will be fundamental to the successful delivery of the action plan and achieving better outcomes for the residents of County Durham.
10. The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee members will have an opportunity at the meeting on the 2 December to provide comments and feedback on the draft poverty action plan.

Recommendations

11. The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note and comment on the contents of the presentation and draft poverty action plan.

Background papers:

Cabinet, 21 October 2015 – Welfare Reform and Poverty Issues

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – There are no additional costs identified within the plan. All actions will be met within existing resources.

Staffing – There are no new staffing implications contained within the action plan

Risk – N/A

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – The actions will be subject to equality impact assessments where appropriate.

Accommodation – N/A

Crime and Disorder – N/A

Human Rights – N/A

Consultation – The draft County Durham Poverty Action Plan will be subject to consultation with a range of organisations and groups, including elected Members, the County Durham Partnership, AAP's, town and parish councils and voluntary groups.

Procurement – N/A

Disability Issues – N/A

Legal Implications – N/A

Appendix 2

Poverty Action Plan for County Durham

Vision

To work together to reduce and prevent poverty as far as possible across County Durham.

Objectives

- *To raise awareness of poverty within the council and amongst our partners.*
- *Ensure our services and partners understand poverty and how we can all work together to help address it.*
- *Identify practical solutions which the council and partners can implement to help reduce and prevent poverty.*

Actions identified will be co-ordinated under five themes:

- *Attitudes to poverty and raising its profile through partnership with agencies and individuals with direct involvement in poverty.*
- *Focus on child poverty.*
- *Credit and debt.*
- *Further welfare reform and benefit changes.*
- *Work, increasing employability, personal wellbeing and sense of worth.*

Poverty Action Plan

Attitudes to poverty and raising its profile through partnership with agencies and individuals with direct involvement in poverty

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
Ensure staff providing frontline services understand poverty and how it affects communities and families within County Durham	Raise awareness amongst council frontline staff on the issues surrounding poverty through existing training programmes, to include information to help staff understand levels of poverty and the impact this is having on residents. Include in this training information on how staff can signpost residents in need of support to services and appropriate organisations	January 2016	Head of Policy & Communications
Make information easily available for frontline staff to help residents affected by poverty	Bring together in one place information about the support available to low income families and ensure that all staff are made aware of this	January 2016	Head of Policy & Communications
	Review how people currently get information and the different places they can find it, for example websites including LOCATE, leaflets and other means of making information available. Rationalise information where necessary to simplify how the information can be accessed	March 2016	Head of Policy & Communications
Understand poverty and how it affects communities and families within County Durham	Establish processes to collect feedback from council frontline services and partners to understand how changes to poverty and welfare are affecting residents and to identify new issues affecting residents	March 2016	Head of Policy & Communications
	Establish a framework that includes agreed indicators of poverty and definitions of poverty. The framework will include information on Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), including benefit sanctions and delays	March 2016	Head of Policy & Communications
	This framework will be monitored regularly and results reported through the Poverty Action Steering Group	Ongoing	Head of Policy & Communications

Poverty Action Plan

Attitudes to poverty and raising its profile through partnership with agencies and individuals with direct involvement in poverty

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
All partners working collectively and thinking about how their work can help address the issues associated with poverty	Put in place methods for two-way communication both within and outside of the council to include all partners that would be able to support work to identify gaps and possible solutions	March 2016	Head of Policy & Communications
	Arrange a conference on poverty, building on previous conferences on welfare reform, which will showcase how organisations are addressing issues and encourage discussion on what gaps currently exist in responding to poverty	March 2016	Head of Policy & Communications
	Work with DWP to establish a social justice programme across the County; to better understand the sanction regime; to ultimately work together to reduce the frequency and impact of benefit sanctions and delays	March 2016	Head of Policy & Communications
	Establish the Advice in County Durham Partnership (ACDP)	September 2015 (completed)	Head of Financial Services
	Identify role of ACDP in helping to address issues arising from poverty and establish a series of actions to maximise the resources available to provide residents with support. Actions to be captured and monitored in the County Durham Poverty Action Plan	March 2016	Head of Financial Services
Ensure we have captured all of the actions identified to help address poverty and monitor implementation and effectiveness	Review, in consultation with partners, the effectiveness of the County Durham Poverty Action Plan and update this as necessary	March 2016	Head of Policy & Communications
	Responsibility for monitoring implementation of the actions will sit with the Poverty Action Steering Group	Ongoing	Assistant Chief Executive

Poverty Action Plan

Focus on child poverty

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
<p>Ensure that poverty does not prevent young people from achieving their potential</p>	<p>Develop an understanding of how poverty is affecting children within County Durham. This will be done through engagement with existing forums and organisations including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools; Durham Schools Forum, Durham Association of Primary Headteachers and Durham Association of Secondary Headteachers Youth organisations 	January 2016	Assistant Chief Executive
	<p>Understand the impact our fees and charges policy has on young people from low income families</p>	January 2016	Head of Financial Services
	<p>In response to the issues identified we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake a review of the Council's existing key strategies and policies to identify how they address child poverty When updating key strategies and plans ensure they include actions to address child poverty Establish a process to ensure all new strategies and policies address child poverty, where appropriate Review the way we work with families who come to us through the children's service single assessment process to ensure they're given appropriate support into benefits and housing services 	March 2016	Consultant in Public Health/Medicine
	<p>Ensure the Poverty Action Steering Group is updated each term on the numbers of children receiving free thirty-hour early years places through the Early Years Strategy</p>	Ongoing	Lead Childcare Development

Poverty Action Plan

Focus on child poverty

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
	<p>Resource initiatives aimed at preventing poverty and supporting children affected by utilising the pupil premium funding within schools. To facilitate this we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange a conference specifically to target the use of pupil premium funding to combat the impact of poverty with 50 schools attending • Ensure half of those attending commit to develop projects in their area that will tackle poverty. • Share learning by reporting back findings on an online community (with findings published more widely) or a follow-up marketplace event, to which a range of schools and settings would be invited 	December 2015	Strategic Manager

Poverty Action Plan

Credit and debt

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
Residents have the best support and advice available concerning their financial situation	Review the information we have on the range of financial support and advice currently available to understand how effective this is. Use the findings to improve the information and advice available, working with the Advice in County Durham Partnership, credit unions and other organisations	March 2016	Head of Financial Services
	Build on the existing triage process already established for welfare reform to extend to all appropriate frontline services and partners to ensure residents are provided with advice and support which helps address the underlying issues	December 2016	Housing, Project & Service Improvement Manager

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
	Increase Family Learning programmes in tackling poverty, particularly Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy programmes to raise the basic skills of parents/carers. Target programmes in areas of high deprivation	July 2016	Strategic Manager Progression and Learning

Poverty Action Plan

Credit and debt

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
	Ensure future commissions for Community Learning provision include anti-poverty measures	October 2016	Strategic Manager Progression and Learning
The Council to continue to provide financial support for residents affected where it can	As part of the annual budget setting process review the DCC Local Council Tax Support Scheme with the aim of maintaining the scheme, recognising this has been a key part of our support for people experiencing poverty since 2013	October 2015 onwards	Head of Financial Services
	Extend the existing loans scheme offered by the Housing Solutions Service through the Financial Assistance Policy	October 2015	Housing Solutions Manager
Promote financial awareness in young people	Working with four schools, establish 'financial literacy champions' in each. The plan will be to reach at least four schools per year to raise financial awareness and promote a savings culture	March 2016 onwards	Strategic Manager
	Ensure participants on the Youth Employment Initiative 'DurhamWorks' (approx. 5,000 unemployed young people) are supported to develop their financial management skills	Ongoing until July 2018	Strategic Manager Progression and Learning
Raise awareness of the dangers of using pay day and doorstep lenders and promote alternative means of support	Continue to introduce and review activities to target illegal money lending, working with Trading Standards	Ongoing	Economic Development Manager
	Continue to reduce the influence and impact of payday and doorstep lenders and weekly payment stores by linking into advice and credit union opportunities	Ongoing	Economic Development Manager
	Continue to raise the profile of credit unions	Ongoing	Economic Development Manager

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
	Promote salary deduction schemes for credit unions to employers across County Durham	Ongoing	Economic Development Manager

Poverty Action Plan

Credit and debt

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
Maintain a strategic partnership to co-ordinate delivery of affordable warmth and energy efficiency programmes in County Durham	Establish a working group to coordinate energy conservation and affordable warmth programmes across County Durham and ensure energy conservation activities are at the heart of all services we deliver	April 2015 completed	Housing Regeneration Manager
	Update the countywide Affordable Warmth Action Plan	Review annually	Housing Solutions Manager
	Review and monitor implementation of the Home Energy Conservation Act Report to ensure actions are addressing poverty issues	Review annually	Housing Solutions Manager
Provide an energy efficiency advice and signposting service	Through the DCC Housing Regeneration Team provide a countywide one stop shop relating to ECO and Warm up North	October 2015	Housing Regeneration Manager
	Promote the support that is available to private households from the Home Improvement Agency	Ongoing	Private Sector Housing Manager
	Hold briefing sessions with organisations that work face-to-face with vulnerable members of the community	Ongoing	Housing Regeneration Manager
Maximise the uptake of energy efficiency improvement programmes	Seek to maximise the uptake of all national energy efficiency and fuel poverty grant schemes utilising DCC's Warm Homes Campaign to co-ordinate a countywide area based delivery programme	Ongoing	Housing Regeneration Manager
	Distribute affordable warmth information to residents through the Warm Homes Campaign newsletter which is delivered to community venues, AAPs and Members	Ongoing	Housing Regeneration Manager
	Get more people to apply to the energy conservation programmes by carrying out area-based promotions	Review annually	Housing Regeneration Manager

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
	Promote Energy Company Obligation Grant information in Council Tax communication	Review annually	Housing Regeneration Manager

Poverty Action Plan

Credit and debt

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
	Work with registered providers to ensure that any improvements to their housing include energy efficiency measures	Ongoing	Housing Regeneration Manager
Maintain a countywide housing energy database to target and report on fuel poverty, energy efficiency and carbon reduction programmes	<p>Continue to maintain a countywide housing energy database to co-ordinate all relevant energy data</p> <p>Establish energy targets for priority housing areas identified via the housing strategy</p> <p>Monitor achievement of targets and success of programmes and report through to Poverty Action Steering Group</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>March 2016</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Housing Regeneration Manager</p> <p>Housing Regeneration Manager</p> <p>Housing Solutions Manager</p>
Enable the Council and partners to respond effectively when residents are affected by fuel poverty	<p>Train frontline staff including social workers, health workers and housing to understand the signs of fuel poverty and be able to refer residents for further help and advice, particularly where acute conditions are experienced e.g. cold damp homes</p> <p>Work with partners to ensure they are aware of signs of fuel poverty and can refer residents for further help and advice</p>	<p>January 2016</p> <p>January 2016</p>	<p>Consultant in Public Health/Medicine</p> <p>Consultant in Public Health/Medicine</p>

Poverty Action Plan

Further welfare reform and benefit changes

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
Respond as appropriate to changes in the Welfare system and seek to understand and manage the impact on residents within County Durham	Continue to develop the relationship with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) both strategically and operationally	Ongoing	Assistant Chief Executive
	<p>Through the Poverty Action Steering Group (PASG) manage how the council responds to the implementation of Universal Credit, including the establishment of the Universal Support local support framework, joint working with housing providers and other partners, preparing the Council for the change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish working group to lead the preparation for the implementation of Universal Credit • Identify initial action plan to support implementation of Universal Credit in County Durham • Establish partnership with DWP in order to implement the Universal Support framework 	May 2015 completed	Head of Financial Services
	Increase the understanding of the impact of Personal Independence Payment (PIP), building on the current work being undertaken by Welfare Rights and our Children and Adult Services (CAS).	January 2016	Head of Financial Services
	Continue to work with housing providers and private landlords to respond to welfare reform and the impact of Universal Credit by helping tenants get the maximum support available, including Discretionary Housing Payments	Ongoing	Housing, Project & Service Improvement Manager
	Appropriate training programmes for frontline staff to be established to provide information on changes to welfare in order that staff can advise and support residents affected	Ongoing	Head of Policy & Communications
The council will continue to work collaboratively with other councils across the North East in responding to the changes and work with ANEC and the ILG to identify impacts and share best practice	Ongoing	Assistant Chief Executive	

Poverty Action Plan

Further welfare reform and benefit changes

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
Continue to provide support and assistance to residents affected by changes in welfare	The Welfare Assistance Scheme to be brought in-house with a new scheme implemented from 1 April 2015	April 2015 Completed	Revenue & Benefits Manager
	Expand the scope of support available through the scheme throughout 2015, ensuring the help provided to people is better integrated across the range of support services available within the Council	March 2016	Revenue & Benefits Manager
	Develop a proposal for continuation of Welfare Assistance Scheme from April 2016 building on the development work above	December 2015	Revenue & Benefits Manager
	Continue Welfare Right's preventative work and ensure it is targeted at those most in need, using a priority system that delivers the required response	Ongoing	Revenue & Benefits Manager
Residents understand the impact of the changes to welfare	The communication programme established for welfare reform will continue. Information already produced will be updated to reflect the ongoing changes, for example the implementation of Universal Credit	Ongoing	Head of Policy & Communications

Poverty Action Plan

Work, increasing employability, personal wellbeing and sense of worth

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
Increase opportunities to support residents into work	Review the overall structure of employment-related training, skills, funding and employability provision in County Durham and revise to improve effectiveness	TBC	Economic Development Manager
	Review existing employability programmes and critically evaluate these to identify those that are successful and where gaps currently exist. Identify opportunities to fill any gaps	December 2015	Economic Development Manager
	Develop a robust and accurate ongoing monitoring programme to evaluate the effectiveness of the schemes and the value for money they provide, i.e. establishing unit costs within the scheme	December 2015	Economic Development Manager

Poverty Action Plan

Work, increasing employability, personal wellbeing and sense of worth

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
	<p>Extend the 'Mentoring and Brokerage Service' which provides help with job-hunts, CVs and applications from South Durham to other AAP areas</p> <p>Continue using the planning framework to encourage businesses to employ local people through the Targeted Recruitment and Training Programme</p> <p>Review how we promote local employment when new employers move into County Durham</p>	<p>December 2016</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>December 2015</p>	<p>Economic Development Manager</p> <p>Economic Development Manager</p> <p>Head of Economic Development & Housing</p>
Increase opportunities to support young people into work	<p>Carry out the County Durham Apprenticeship Action Plan. Use it to provide comprehensive support to help young people progress into apprenticeships; provide career opportunities and ensure young people have the skills that local businesses need</p> <p>Seek to increase Apprenticeship provision delivered through the DCC Adult Learning and Skills Service</p> <p>Implement the DCC Traineeship Programme for vulnerable young people (initial focus on Looked After Children) with identified progression pathways to Apprenticeship provision. Following this undertake an evaluation to determine the schemes effectiveness</p> <p>Implement the Youth Employment Initiative, 'DurhamWorks' which seeks to support 15-24 year old unemployed County Durham residents into employment, education or training through intensive and long-term support; innovative and engaging activities to develop motivation, work-related skills and work experience and increased employment opportunities</p>	<p>TBC</p> <p>March 2016</p> <p>March 2016</p> <p>Ongoing until July 2018</p>	<p>Economic Development Manager</p> <p>Strategic Manager Progression and Learning</p> <p>Strategic Manager Progression and Learning</p> <p>Strategic Manager Progression and Learning</p>
Increase the opportunities for training to improve skills	<p>Review all current training programmes across the county and develop a plan to introduce further programmes to fill any gaps</p>	<p>December 2015</p>	<p>Economic Development Manager</p>

Poverty Action Plan

Work, increasing employability, personal wellbeing and sense of worth

Goal	How will we do this (Actions)	Timeframe	Lead
	DCC Adult Learning and Skills Service to prioritise delivery of training programmes for the unemployed targeting: unemployed adults, especially those long term unemployed and those living in deprived areas; adults with low or no skills; learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with mental health issues; adults recovering from substance misuse; and those suffering from domestic violence	July 2016	Strategic Manager Progression and Learning
	Consider how volunteering can play a part in helping residents into long-term employment	March 2016	Economic Development Manager