

2 July 2018



Child Poverty Update

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Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to update the Children and Young People's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee members on the progress of the Child Poverty Working Group (CPWG) since the last report in September 2017. The CPWG aims to develop and implement a single coherent and coordinated approach to addressing and mitigating child poverty across County Durham.

Background

- 2 Poverty can affect every area of a child's development - social, educational, health and personal. Living in a poor household can reduce children's expectations of their lives and lead to a cycle where poverty is repeated from generation to generation. As adults they are more likely to suffer ill health, be unemployed or homeless, and become involved in offending, drug and alcohol abuse, and abusive relationships.
- 3 The introduction of Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 placed a duty on government to report on child poverty. However, the act repealed parts of the Child Poverty Act 2010, including the duty placed on local authorities to prepare and publish an assessment of the needs of children living in poverty in their area. The new act also introduces new measures of child poverty with an emphasis taken away from income; these include:
 - (a) the proportion of children living in workless households as well as long-term worklessness households; and
 - (b) the educational attainment of children (and disadvantaged children) in England at end of Key Stage 4 (GCSE).

Levels of Child Poverty

- 4 Latest national data shows child poverty is relatively high in the North East and is increasing. Over the three years from 2014/15 to 2016/17, data from the HMRC estimate that around 1 in 4 children (24%) in the North East live in a household with a relatively low income, higher than the UK average of 19%. For the North East this represents a four percentage point change from 20% for the three year period from 2013/14 to 2015/16 increasing compared to the UK trend which was flat. Increasing poverty is generally attributed to a range of factors including wages not keeping up with cost of living, such as increases in

housing, child care, transport, utilities and food as well as changes to tax credits and child tax credits.

- 5 Local proxy data for child poverty within County Durham tends to reflect trends in out-of-work poverty which have shown recent improvements as the employment rate has improved over recent years. The proportion of children living in workless families in County Durham fell to 13.4% in 2016 (from 19.3% in 2015) and the proportion of children in County Durham schools eligible for free school meals has steadily declined over the last six years to 18.1%. However, it should be recognised that two-thirds (66%) of children in poverty live in households where at least one adult is in work (HBAI 2014/15-2016/17 BHC) so local proxy data only presents part of the picture of child poverty.
- 6 The introduction of Welfare Reform, alongside reductions in local government funding, requires a coordinated multi agency strategic approach to address the causes of and impact of poverty on children, young people and families living in County Durham.

Progress of the County Durham Child Poverty Working Group

- 7 The Child Poverty Working Group (CPWG) use the Joseph Rowntree definition of poverty: '**When a person's resources are well below their minimum needs, including the need to take part in society**'. The group agreed this definition describes not only monetary and resource poverty but also poverty of opportunity.
- 8 Dr Deborah Harrison, North East Child Poverty Commission has supported the group to formulate an approach to Child Poverty in County Durham in which three key strands have emerged:
 - (a) **Language and values associated with child poverty:** this will focus on our attitudes and beliefs towards poverty and will involve the development of a shared language and a media strategy;
 - (b) **Poverty Management in communities linked to early help:** this will focus on understanding County Durham's child poverty cohort, developing and implementing targeted, accessible support to families. This strand will also focus on the learning and development needs of frontline staff across the partnership to ensure they are confident to provide access to support to address poverty;
 - (c) **Economic - Good Jobs for young people and families in County Durham:** this will focus on the economic partnership and secondary school sector to ensure major economic developments in County Durham are seen as key opportunities to provide local young people and adults with routes into good jobs and apprenticeships.
- 9 The Child Poverty Working Group has developed a Plan on a Page (see appendix 2) and associated action log, which outlines the vision, key priorities, measures of success and key deliverables to address child poverty across County Durham.

10 A number of key deliverables have been achieved to date; these include:

- (a) **‘Cutting the cost of the school day’ programme;** The CPWG identified the need to address poverty within education settings as a priority. As evidence suggests the cost of the school day to be significant on low-income families and can affect the ability for the child to take part in educational opportunities. Workshops were held in six County Durham schools to understand the potential cost impact of school, focusing specifically on areas such as school uniform, meals, resources and equipment, after school clubs, trips, charity and fun events. As a result of the findings, a top tips leaflet (see appendix 3) and training package has been developed to support schools to minimise costs and remove potential barriers to accessing educational opportunities. The ‘Cut the cost of the school day: Raising awareness of child poverty’ training package is available for schools to attend from the autumn term 2018 and a roll out plan has been designed to ensure the majority of schools across the county are able to take part over the next two academic years. The training aims to raise awareness of child poverty across County Durham, supports schools to gain a deeper insight into the scale and impact of child poverty, challenges the stigma associated with living in poverty and supports schools to develop practical steps in which to cut the cost of the school day. To monitor the outcomes of the training, schools will be requested to complete an action plan, evidencing how they have implemented the training into their own setting to address the needs of their pupils and families.
- (b) The development and implementation of **‘Smarter Budgeting’** training for Children Services Social Workers and practitioners across the County Durham Partnership. This training aims to help staff to identify and address financial exclusion with the families they work with. To date over 200 staff have undertaken this training.
- (c) A second round of **‘Routes out of Poverty’** multi-agency workshops have been delivered with 280 participants. Participants reported overwhelmingly the information shared at the session would change their practice and they had an increased knowledge of the help and support available to families affected by poverty.
- (d) Development and implementation of the **Voluntary and Community Sector Alliance programme** within Children Services. This sets out to develop closer working relationships between local VCS provision and Children Services to “*ensure optimum involvement of the voluntary and community sectors in delivering services to families*” and recognises the significant impact the VCS can have in supporting families’ longer term within their own communities. In February 2018 a VCS Alliance Coordinator and four VCS Alliance workers were appointed within the One Point Service to develop effective pathways to VCS provision across local communities.
- (e) The commencement of collating and coordinating all planned **‘Holiday Activities with Food’** across County Durham. This work aims to ensure a comprehensive programme of holiday activities with food are available

in areas of high deprivation in order to address 'holiday hunger'. A project group has been identified and will lead and develop this work.

- (f) A recent review of **financial support** provided by Children Services such as S17 for children and families in receipt of statutory support, the Family Fund (including Greggs Fund) available to families on the Stronger Families programme and Welfare Assistance Scheme payments, has developed more robust probity to ensure the most appropriate source of funds are provided to families who require financial assistance.

Next Steps

- 11 Planned next steps for the Child Poverty Working Group include the following:
 - (a) The development and implementation of a Child Poverty Charter.
 - (b) Further development and implementation of a coordinated and evidence based Holiday Activities with Food programme across County Durham. Cllr Brown and Cllr Gunn are planning to visit North Lanarkshire Council to ascertain key elements of their successful 365 Holiday Food programme. These findings along with an evaluation undertaken by Northumbria University of holiday activities with food: A 'day out' not a 'handout' undertaken across the North East will be utilised to develop an evidence base for County Durham's future holiday activities with food programme.
 - (c) Develop accessible promotional materials to promote the availability of financial support to help families with childcare costs.
 - (d) Development of a 'Local Early Help Offer' in and through County Durham Family Centres which will provide range of support addressing inequalities and financial exclusion in order that all children and young people get the best start in life.
 - (e) Continue to implement and deliver actions as set out in Child Poverty plan on a page.

Recommendation

- 12 Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee members are requested to:
 - (a) note the progress of the Child Poverty Working Group; and
 - (b) agree the planned next steps.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – none

Staffing – none

Risk – none

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – none

Accommodation – none

Crime and Disorder – addresses impact of poverty on increased criminal behaviours

Human Rights – addresses inequalities

Consultation – none

Procurement – none

Disability Issues – none

Legal Implications – none