

NORTH EAST DERBYSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
CHILD POVERTY

MARCH 2013

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## Chairs Foreword

We have come to take for granted the fact that young people will have better life chances than the previous generation. Certainly, since the end of the Second World War that expectation has been true. The last Labour Government in particular made substantial progress in reducing levels of child poverty, removing 200,000 children from having to live below the poverty line. However, under the present Conservative/Lib Dem Coalition Government that expectation is no longer true and studies by respected organisation such as the Institute of Fiscal Studies suggest that rather than the life chances of young people getting better, for many children, things are going to get substantially worse. Indeed, in the next 3 years alone that figure is expected to see 300,000 children, many of them living in North East Derbyshire, slip back into poverty particularly as welfare cuts start to bite.

This Council has a strong commitment to tackling all types of inequality and to enhancing the life chances of its residents. It doesn't need a statutory framework to force it to take these measures. This review provides a snap shot into the levels of child poverty in North East Derbyshire and the effects it has on young people. However, it is but an opening shot when dealing with this issue and the recommendations are designed to encourage the Cabinet to establish a baseline figure so that the effects of Government policy can be measured as well as proposing the taking of positive steps to address this issue. However, we are under no illusion that a small district council such as NEDDC can, on its own, stop this increase in child poverty levels. But what we are convinced of is that this Council has a duty to stand up for its residents and to expose the effects of particular Government policies on the children and young people living in our community.

## Review Panel

The panel comprised the following members:

Councillor K Gillott (Chair) (Labour)

Councillor A D Garrett	(Labour)
Councillor P J Hemsley	(Labour)
Councillor C Hunt	(Labour)
Councillor J Hill	(Labour)
Councillor D Skinner	(Labour)
Councillor G P Ramshaw	(Conservative)

The review was supported by the Overview and Scrutiny Manager and the Principal Governance Officer

### 1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Council review how it monitors the changes and impact of Child Poverty within its area and establish a baseline
- 1.2 That the Councils ambition to reduce Child Poverty be included in the Corporate Plan
- 1.3 That the Council identify an officer who is responsible for overseeing Child Poverty activities within the Council.
- 1.4 That the Council should actively consider child poverty as an important consideration in the preparation of Equality Impact Assessments
- 1.5 That the Council consider the framework of work it is currently undertaking on financial inclusion with a view to ensuring there is a central co-ordinating officer responsible for this work to avoid fragmentation.
- 1.6 That the Council consider appointing a champion for Affordable Warmth
- 1.7 That the Council encourage the further development of the relationship with Derbyshire County Council and any other appropriate agencies to support the reduction of Child Poverty
- 1.8 That support is given to the completion of a database by Derbyshire County Council setting out what all agencies in Derbyshire including the Council, Fire, Police and Health are currently doing to reduce Child Poverty within Derbyshire

## 2. Introduction

- 2.1 At its meeting on 13th June, 2012 the Safer Homes and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee considered its work programme for 2011/12. For its yearly review it decided to investigate Child Poverty within North East Derbyshire.
- 2.2 The review was identified as a priority on the work programme as government pledges to reduce child poverty were not being met and the levels were increasing. The impact of reductions in benefits and the changing employment environment would make Child Poverty worse. The cost to society as a whole and individually to the wellbeing of the child was considerable. However the causes of child poverty were many and some of them complex. The Committee sought to review what the Council was doing to help alleviate child poverty within its area.

## 3. Scope of Review

3.1 The review aimed to:

- Explore the key issues that lead to child poverty and how they can be addressed
- Gain an understanding of child poverty levels in North East Derbyshire and how this compares regionally and nationally
- Clarify the Council's role in preventing child poverty and how this relates to the County role
- Evaluate the activities the Council is currently undertaking to reduce/eradicate child poverty
- Support the identification of appropriate measures the Council can take to reduce child poverty
- Raise awareness of child poverty and how this relates to the Council's vision

## 4. Method of Review

- 4.1 The Review Panel met on six occasions to consider the scope of the review, key issues they wanted to discuss and key people they wished to interview. They considered a variety of information in order to gain an understanding of the subject area.

4.2 The Review Panel interviewed a wide range of officers who were involved in the service at North East Derbyshire District Council. They also invited a representative from the County Council to come and talk with the Committee and sent questionnaires to agencies involved in this area. Attached at **Appendix 4(1)** is a list of stakeholders interviewed.

## 5. Evidence and Research

The following documents were considered as part of the review:

Presentation entitled 'Developing a Child Poverty Strategy for Derbyshire' given by Julie Hirst Public Health Specialist NHS Derbyshire County

Child Poverty Needs Assessment – Derbyshire Children and Young People's Trust

Statistics on child poverty within North East Derbyshire Wards – Department of Work and Pensions

Draft Financial Inclusion Derbyshire Strategy 2012-12015

Financial Inclusion Derbyshire Strategy Action Plan 2009-12

## 6. Key Findings

### **Examples of Good Practice/Opportunities**

6.1 Child Poverty is a complex and multi faceted subject. There are several contributors to Child Poverty and it is not an area that can be solved easily by any one agency or measure. Competing priorities and reduced budgets by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Government have put additional pressures on the authority who is struggling to deal with this issue. Levels of child poverty had been decreasing prior to 2010 as a result of a number of policies in place. This situation was now in reverse and the Council needed to do what it could to alleviate this. On a positive note there was evidence that different areas of the Council were undertaking work that could contribute to alleviating Child Poverty.

6.2 It was recognised that employment was one of the most effective ways out of poverty. However, with the current economic climate this has become more difficult to obtain. There was good evidence that the Council was trying to address this issue. This included successful work being carried out within the Economic Development and Regeneration Department to try and improve people chances of gaining employment. A Senior Community Employment Advisor had been appointed to co-ordinate the Working Communities Project. The purpose of this project was to provide people who are out of work with the relevant advice, training and support to get them back into employment. As part of the project the Economic

Development Team had developed good working relationships with local Job Centres and transport companies who are looking at methods to help new workers to get to work. The project had focused on the latest index of multiple deprivation which had highlighted Grassmoor and Killamarsh and other areas of high unemployment such as Holmewood and North Wingfield. By engaging with other agencies a multi team approach was being used. To date over 107 people had been helped back into work through the scheme.

- 6.3 The Council had also developed an Employment and Skills Policy which had three key aims:- to bring employment opportunities into the district, to improve skills and to reduce worklessness. This linked with other work being undertaken in Economic Development. Funding was received from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust to appoint a project Manager. She had been working with neighbouring councils, colleges, businesses including Tesco, Aldi and Debenhams plus Sheffield City Region to maximise employment opportunities for residents in the District.
- 6.4 The Revenues and Benefits Team had a role to play in Child Poverty. Income into a household had a significant affect on Child Poverty. Along with salaries benefits played a part in this. Revenues and Benefits were responsible for administering a number of benefits on behalf of the Council and also collected data on the number of people receiving benefits within the area. They acted in a signposting role to other organisations and helped inform people what benefits they are eligible for. The impact of Welfare Reforms would have a significant effect on claimants' finances and the section had been working to provide information to encourage take up of benefits. They also had established good links with other agencies including the Unemployed Workers Centre, Citizens Advice Bureau, Law Centre and the Credit Unions. In addition they are working with Rykneld Homes to do more outreach work but reduced resources make this difficult. The Council also aims to process benefits claims in a timely manner to support people's financial stability.
- 6.5 Health was another key important area for Child Poverty. Health problems in children suffering poverty does not always manifest immediately. It can be visible through low birth weight or emotional problems and development but sometimes the effects did not occur until later in life. However, the impact can have a profound effect which is long lasting as well as affecting the short term. The Associate Director of Public Health advised the Committee that the affect on health throughout life cannot be understated.
- 6.6 The Council had a number of initiatives that were aimed at supporting children's health generally. These included the 5/60 programme delivered in schools to encourage children to participate in activity regularly , healthy eating projects, credit union development to support families finances and using the councils leisure facilities to facilitate events that promote health and wellbeing.

- 6.7 Financial inclusion was another key area of work. The Partnership Team were working on supporting financial inclusion as part of a package of locality activity focused on addressing deprivation, for which the council had recently provided a £100,000 to support such projects. This included supporting the Credit Union with funding and providing a grant to advice agencies which was important with the implementation of the Welfare Reforms. The section was also considering whether joint energy schemes to provide low cost energy would be worth pursuing to help people with their fuel bills.
- 6.8 The Council had an affordable warmth strategy which sought to identify how the Council could contribute to alleviating fuel poverty. Initiatives included projects such as warmfront and obtaining funding from the Department of Energy and Climate Change to help with heating repairs, boiler replacements, loft and cavity wall insulation. Software was being used to help identify vulnerable people in the District including families in poverty so that they could be targeted to receive appropriate information
- 6.9 Rykneld Homes is a key partner of the Council. Their work brings them into contact with a wide section of the community. Currently they visit tenants every two years which they are seeking to reduce to one year. They also work in the wider communities with young people to actively engage them in projects such as community tidy up and as a reward the participating youngsters get a Christmas Party. Part of this role is the identification of vulnerable people.
- 6.10 An Income maximisation officer has been appointed who along with chasing arrears provides basic advice about housing benefits and links to the Credit Union. The organisation supports the East Midlands Jam Jar account to help prioritise saving money to cover key priorities. Education to help encourage sustainable financial behaviours is important. They are currently visiting all families likely to be affected by the Welfare Reforms to support them to cover their commitments. Additionally Rykneld Homes are working to delivery good quality housing that meets the decent homes standard. This was seen as another important factor in improving the lives of children in poverty. Poor housing could lead to poor health and effect children's future in terms of educational outcomes, employment rates and levels of wealth.
- 6.11 The review panel received a detailed presentation from Julie Hirst Public Health Specialist at NHS Derbyshire County. She advised the panel that the County Council were currently producing a Child Poverty Strategy. However, Local Authorities and their partners needed to be realistic in their child poverty outcome goals. Most recognised that they could not, single-handedly eradicate poverty but there was much that local partnerships could do to mitigate the effects of poverty. A Child Poverty Needs Assessment had been completed in November 2011 and evidence of what works to reduce or mitigate child poverty undertaken. It was hoped to create a database of what was already happening in Derbyshire



to reduce or mitigate Child Poverty. The review panel were supportive of assisting the capturing of work this council was undertaking in this area.

### **Areas for Improvement**

- 6.12 It was important to ensure that the work being undertaken within the Council was co-ordinated and that the impact could be measured. This was necessary for the Council to target its limited resources where it could have most impact. In order to help the Council achieve this it was proposed that they should establish and publish a baseline for Child Poverty based on the figures provided by Central Government.
- 6.13 The Council was already undertaking work to support reduction of Child Poverty. Work on the impending impacts arising from the Welfare Reforms had been substantial and indicated that it was highly likely to negatively affect the levels of Child Poverty. The review panel felt that it was important that the Council recognise and acknowledge how serious an issue Child Poverty is for the Council.
- 6.14 To support this panel proposed that the Council should reflect it as a priority in the Corporate Plan. There should be a review of all what the Council is doing in this area to ensure that available resources are provided and used effectively. There should also be consideration of Child Poverty in preparation of Equality Impact Assessments and when reports are presented to Cabinet. The Panel also recognised the support the Cabinet had already given in this area including the establishment of a cross cutting working group.
- 6.15 Whilst there was much activity on financial inclusion work some officers commented that the work was fragmented and there was no one central point through which information filtered so it could be co-ordinated and evaluated. This point was also made generally on the whole of the Child Poverty work. It was suggested that the Council would benefit from a senior officer being responsible overall for Child Poverty. This would ensure continuity year on year and ensure that the Council develops a culture that supported financial stability. Additionally the identification of an affordable warmth champion would be a positive move.
- 6.16 The Council already had an established relationship with Derbyshire County Council. As a first tier authority they had a duty under the Child Poverty Act 2010 to produce and publish a child needs assessment and to develop a child poverty strategy to reduce and mitigate the effects of poverty on children. The Council should encourage further development of this relationship and other agencies to support the reduction of Child Poverty.
- 6.17 The Review Panel congratulated and supported the Unemployed Workers Centre, Credit Union, Citizens Advice Bureaux and Law Centre in how they have handled the cuts. However, the committee felt that there was scope to rationalise the service and make it smarter.

## 7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The Review Panel concluded that addressing Child Poverty was a complex matter which needed the input from a variety of agencies. There was no one initiative that would solve this problem on its own but the Council could play its part in helping to alleviate Child Poverty. The review had found evidence of a number of activities the Council was already taking in this area.
- 7.2 However, a number of improvements had been identified which it was hoped would support the Council and its partners in this role.

# APPENDIX 4(1)

## 8. Stakeholders Engaged During Review

Julie Hirst	County Primary Care Trust
Steve Lee	Strategic Partnership Co-ordinator
Steve Pintus	Associate Director of Public Health
Rebecca Slack	Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager
Angela Smith	Housing and Support Services Manager
Ian Spencer	Revenues and Benefits Manager
Heather Summers	Customer Services and Community Involvement Manager
Alison Westray Chapman	Assistant Director of Corporate Resources

### **Questionnaires received from External organisations:**

Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire Credit Unit

Derbyshire County Council

North East Derbyshire Citizens Advice Bureau