
Meeting: Executive
Date: 15 March 2011
Subject: Child Poverty Strategy
Report of: Cllr Mrs Anita Lewis, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
Summary: The report sets out a draft strategy to reduce child poverty and alleviate the effects of child poverty in Central Bedfordshire.

Advising Officer: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services
Contact Officer: Mark Wheeler, Interim Assistant Director - Operations
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Executive
Key Decision Yes
Reason for urgency/ exemption from call-in (if appropriate) Not applicable

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The report relates to four of the Council's key priorities:

- Educating, protecting and providing opportunities for children and young people.
- Managing growth effectively
- Creating safer communities
- Promoting healthier lifestyles

Financial:

To fulfil the intention of the legislation on Child Poverty, a percentage of existing budgets should be earmarked for tackling child poverty enabling work to focus on areas of greatest need. This could also be negotiated with partners through the Children's Trust. This percentage would be voluntary, not mandatory.

Legal:

The local authority is required under the Child Poverty Act 2010 to prepare, publish and keep under review a local child poverty needs assessment and a joint strategy with partner agencies setting out how it will address these needs. In preparing a Child Poverty Strategy, the local authority will be meeting its legal duties as set out in the statutory guidance published by the Government in October 2010.

Risk Management:

An effective child poverty strategy will help to reduce the stress on families with the additional risks that this can cause.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

None

Equalities/Human Rights:

An Equality Impact Assessment of the Strategy is being developed in conjunction with the strategy which shows areas of good practice within Central Bedfordshire in addressing the needs of those living in poverty, taking into account the diverse needs of the community.

Community Safety:

None

Sustainability:

The strategy will sit alongside the Sustainable Communities Strategy and the Children and Young People's Plan and will address the longer term needs of the community.

Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Comments:

- Members requested target dates and percentages to be shown. These have been added at paragraph 41.
- Members requested an adjustment to the wording of Objective 2, along with a linked longer term priority. This has been incorporated.
- Members queried the statement that "children who grow up in a low income household are more likely than others to themselves become unemployed and to do low paid jobs – there is evidence of an intergenerational cycle of poverty. This is evidenced by the Child Poverty Review published by HM Treasury in July 2004.

RECOMMENDATION:

that the Executive adopt the Child Poverty Strategy.

Reason for Recommendation:

So that the local authority will meet its legislative duties as set out in the Child Poverty Act 2010 to publish by April 2011 and keep under review its local child poverty strategy.

Executive Summary

The Child Poverty Strategy sets out four key objectives for tackling child poverty locally which take into consideration the building blocks set out by the national Child Poverty Unit (Financial Support, Parental Employment and Skills, Life Chances, Place):

1. Maximise opportunities for families in poverty to access employment which will have the outcome of more families working and thus reducing levels of child and family poverty.

2. Ensure families in poverty are accessing all available financial assistance with the outcome that non-working families move from worklessness into work in the meantime accessing appropriate benefits.
3. To improve the life chances of children and families by intervening early to prevent poor outcomes and raising educational achievements and aspirations with the outcome that children from poor households gain better qualifications to ensure their access to the labour market so that the cycle of intergenerational poverty is broken.
4. Work with colleagues from all sectors and agencies to improve the environmental factors which exacerbate the effects of poverty, harnessing the resources of the third sector and services across the Council in order to achieve priorities, with the outcome that poor families develop healthier lifestyles to prolong life expectancy and live in an improved environment.

Each of these objectives is underpinned by a number of priorities.

Background

1. In 2008/9, across the UK, 2.8 million children were living in relative poverty (a reduction of 100,000 over the previous 10 years) of which 1.6 million were living in absolute poverty and 2.2 million were living in families which suffered low income and material deprivation.
2. In June 2010, the Child Poverty Act received Royal Assent. This enshrined in legislation a long held Government ambition to eradicate Child Poverty by 2020 and places a number of statutory duties on both Central and Local Government.
3. Local Authorities are required to co-operate with partners (e.g. Health Authorities, Job Centre Plus, Police, Youth Offending and Probation Services) to produce a local Child Poverty Strategy and Child Poverty Assessment.

Child Poverty Strategy

4. At its meeting on 19 October 2010, the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services highlighting the key issues for Central Bedfordshire in relation to child poverty. At a subsequent meeting on 25 January 2010 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee examined the Draft Strategy, and made some suggestions for amendments. These have been incorporated into the strategy.
5. The Children's Trust and the LSP have been consulted and agreed to adopt the policy.
6. In Central Bedfordshire 12.1% of children are living in poverty. This is based on the most up to date figures available from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) from 2008-2009 and is the benchmark for this strategy. In neighbouring authorities the figures for the same years are 30% in Luton and 20% in Bedford.

7. However the headline figures mask some areas with high levels of poverty. In Tithe Farm 31.4% of children are living in poverty, in Parkside 27.1%, Manshead 25.6%, Northfields 24.8% and Houghton Hall 22.9%. A further 6 wards have levels above 15% including some in Leighton Buzzard and Sandy. The most recent Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) figures also include part of Flitwick East with high levels of multiple deprivation.
8. The Child Poverty Strategy sets out four key objectives for tackling Child Poverty locally which take into consideration the building blocks set out by the national Child Poverty Unit (Financial Support, Parental Employment and Skills, Life Chances, Place) as follows:
- Objective 1:** Maximise opportunities for families in poverty to access employment which will have the outcome of more families working and thus reducing levels of family and child poverty.
- Objective 2:** Ensure families in poverty are accessing all available financial assistance with the outcome that non-working families move from worklessness into work in the meantime accessing appropriate benefits.
- Objective 3:** To improve life chances of children and families by intervening early to prevent poor outcomes and raising educational achievements and aspirations with the outcome that children from poor households gain better qualifications to ensure their access to the labour market so that the cycle of intergenerational poverty is broken.
- Objective 4:** Work with colleagues from all sectors and agencies to improve the environmental factors which exacerbate the effects of poverty, harnessing the resources of the third sector and services across the council in order to achieve priorities, with the outcome that poor families develop healthier lifestyles to prolong life expectancy and live in an improved environment.
9. Each objective is underpinned by a number of immediate and longer term priorities:

Priorities underpinning Objective 1

10. *Immediate priorities*
- (a) Continued development of the 'economic powerhouse' – a vision and strategy to attract investment and deliver strong local employment growth.
- (b) Developing employability and job readiness skills, based on both academic work and work based training.
- (c) Ensuring that adequate childcare and the appropriate Childcare Tax Credit is available to enable parents to take up working and training opportunities.

11. *Longer term priorities*

- a) Providing increased training and work experience for 14-16 year olds.
- b) Developing apprenticeship opportunities.
- c) Improving transport enabling easier access to work opportunities.
- d) Engaging with the community in addressing the basic skills agenda.
- e) Encouraging Social Enterprise support for families in poverty.
- f) Supporting local business resilience, growth and enterprise.
- g) Working with parents of children with disabilities to enhance confidence in childcare enabling additional take-up and possibility of working.

Priorities underpinning Objective 2

12 *Immediate priorities*

- a) Promoting the take-up of free school meals.
- b) Providing easily accessible high quality welfare advice and information services.

13. *Longer term priorities*

- a) Promoting the progression from benefit to paid employment.
- b) Money management training to different age ranges within the community.

Priorities underpinning Objective 3

14. *Immediate Priorities*

- a) Ensuring that high quality early years intervention and prevention services are in place.
- b) Supporting parents and families through the Parenting and Family Support Strategy.
- c) Developing a culture for learning based on high aspirations for all.

15. *Longer term priorities*

- a) Improving attendance rates at school and reducing exclusion rates.
- b) Reducing the number of those not in education, employment or training (NEET).

- c) Reducing the achievement gap between children eligible for Free School Meals and their peers.
- d) Endorsing the importance of healthy lifestyles.

Priorities underpinning Objective 4

16. *Immediate priorities*

- a) Reducing the number and rate of teenage pregnancies.
- b) Embedding the Think Family approach within all homelessness prevention activity, and broader interventions to sustain families in permanent settled accommodation.
- c) Promoting a multi-agency approach to improved ante-, peri- and post-natal care, along with improved levels of breastfeeding support and information on healthy eating.

17. *Longer term priorities*

- a) Working with partners to reduce the levels of crime and their impact on families in deprived areas.
- b) Expanding Stop Smoking services for all family members, with a focus on pregnant women and those with very young children.
- c) Embedding the Healthier Steps to Employment Programme.
- d) Working in Partnership.

Conclusion and Next Steps

- 18. Detailed action plans working across the Council and in consultation with partners will be drawn up. The Children's Trust will monitor performance and outcomes across the different provider agencies. A six month progress report on the actions of the Children's Trust to delivery the strategy will be brought to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2011.

Appendices:

Appendix A - Child Poverty Strategy

Background Papers - None