

Wiltshire Council

Children's Services Select Committee
22 July 2011

Cabinet
26 July 2011

Subject: Reducing Child Poverty Strategy

Cabinet member: Councillor Lionel Grundy
(Children's Services)
Councillor Keith Humphries
(Public Health & Public Protection Services)

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this report is for Cabinet to approve the Wiltshire Reducing Child Poverty Strategy.
2. Reducing child poverty has been a central government target for many years. The Child Poverty Act, which commits the current and future governments, to eradicating child poverty by 2020 received Royal Assent in March 2010. The Act requires central government to produce a national strategy and reduce child poverty. It also requires local areas to address child poverty through cooperation between partners, the production of a needs assessment and implementation of a child poverty strategy.
3. There are a number of ways that child poverty can be measured. The one most often used by central government denotes that children are living in poverty if their household income is less than 60% of the median national income. Using this measure, nationally there are approximately 2.8 million children (22%) living in poverty and approximately 11,000 (11%) living in Wiltshire. These figures mask huge variability when considering small areas and there are areas of Wiltshire where over 30% of children are living in poverty.
4. The Wiltshire needs assessment and strategy was prepared by a multi-agency task group, and was informed through consultation with a wide audience including early years' settings, schools, thematic partnerships, Wiltshire Assembly, parents and young people. The key strategic objectives of the strategy are:
 - Providing support to the 0-5 year olds in the most disadvantaged families
 - Narrowing the Educational Attainment Gap
 - An inclusive Wiltshire with an appropriate job for everyone and economic opportunity for all
 - Consolidated, geographic approaches to child poverty
 - Keeping child poverty in the spotlight.

Proposal

5. To approve the Reducing Child Poverty Strategy and draft delivery plan.

Reason for Proposal

6. To meet the statutory duty under the Child Poverty Act 2010 for the Local Authority to produce a needs assessment and local strategy.

Carolyn Godfrey**Corporate Director, Children and Education****Maggie Rae****Corporate Director, Public Health and Wellbeing**

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Key Decision: No

Purpose of Report

1. For Cabinet to approve the Wiltshire Reducing Child Poverty Strategy.

Background

2. Reducing child poverty has been a central government target for many years. The Child Poverty Act, which commits the current and future governments, to eradicating child poverty by 2020 received Royal Assent in March 2010. The Act requires central government to produce a national strategy and reduce child poverty. It also requires local areas to address child poverty through cooperation between partners, the production of a needs assessment and implementation of a child poverty strategy.
3. It is important to remember that the local authority and its partners are required to work towards reducing child poverty and mitigating its effects. However, national policy and the state of the economy have significant impact. The new central government child poverty strategy identifies a number of key policy changes which it intends to make in order to reduce poverty. Social mobility is a key factor in its plans.
4. The Coalition produced its child poverty strategy in April 2011 "A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families Lives". Whilst recognising the importance of income, its aims are also relates to "strengthening families, encouraging responsibility, promoting work, guaranteeing fairness and proving support to the most vulnerable". It points to a large number of policy changes which it expects to impact on poverty including the introduction of the Universal Credit, roll out of the Work Programme, Pupil premiums added to schools budgets and extending the role of the Independent Reviewer on social mobility to include child poverty.
5. There are a number of ways that child poverty can be measured. The one most often used by central government denotes that children are living in

poverty if their household income is less than 60% of the median national income. Using this measure, nationally there are approximately 2.8 million children (22%) living in poverty and approximately 11,000 (11%) living in Wiltshire. These figures mask huge variability when considering small areas and there are areas of Wiltshire where over 30% of children are living in poverty.

6. The Wiltshire draft needs assessment and strategy was prepared by a multi-agency task group including representatives from Wiltshire Council (Children and Education, Economic Development, Housing, Research and Intelligence), NHS Wiltshire, Police and Job Centre Plus. The Strategy suggested 5 key strategic objectives:
 - Keeping child poverty in the spotlight
 - Local partners to sign up to a reducing child poverty charter.
 - Providing support to the 0-5 year olds in the most disadvantaged families
 - Further develop the role of the children's centres.
 - Deliver the Healthy Child Programme within available resources.
 - Narrowing the educational attainment gap
 - Support and encourage the take-up of free childcare places for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.
 - Schools and other agencies to continue to address the attainment gap.
 - Creating an inclusive Wiltshire with an appropriate job for everyone and economic opportunity for all
 - The Wiltshire Work and Skills Plan identifies five priority themes and includes detailed action plans for addressing worklessness.
 - Considering a consolidated, geographic approach to areas of concentrated child poverty
7. The needs assessment and strategy were sent out for wide consultation from 19 January – 4 April 2011. Contributions to the consultation were invited from a wide audience including early years' settings, schools, thematic partnerships, Wiltshire Assembly, parents and young people. A stakeholder event was held in March which attracted a wide variety of attendees and useful contributions.

Main Considerations for the Council

8. The summary of the results of the consultation are included as appendix 1.
9. In general, the feedback was supportive of the proposed strategic objectives but recognised the tensions with the current economic climate. There was also suggestion that the objectives were re-worded and re-ordered so they are now:

- Provide support to the 0-5 year olds in the most disadvantaged families
 - Narrowing the Educational Attainment Gap
 - An inclusive Wiltshire with an appropriate job for everyone and economic opportunity for all
 - Consolidated, geographic approaches to child poverty
 - Keep child poverty in the spotlight.
10. Much of the feedback included discussion and suggestions of what currently happens “on the ground” and what needs to be improved. There was an emphasis on the need for strong, coordinated multiagency working across sectors. The need for accessible, good information, support and guidance to families was highlighted as key, alongside different agencies being aware of the network of support that was available so that they could signpost families to additional support services correctly. The feedback also pointed to a greater emphasis in the strategy on the groups most vulnerable to poverty. This section has been brought into the strategy from the needs assessment to highlight those at risk.
 11. The revised needs assessment and strategy are included with this report as appendices 2 and 3. It is evident that national and local strategies need to work together to impact on poverty and its effects.
 12. A draft high level delivery plan has been written and is included at appendix 4. The full set of consultation responses will be circulated to those involved in the implementation of the delivery plan to influence their actions.
 13. It is important to note that some work plans already exist to deliver parts of this strategy and that the intention is not to create an extra layer of monitoring or bureaucracy but to capitalise on existing work that will help mitigate against child poverty and to focus additional energy into strategic objectives 4 and 5 which will need more planning and effort. Likewise, there are strategies that also help reduce child poverty and mitigate the effects, for example the Family and Parenting Support Commissioning Strategy and the draft Housing Strategy, the impact of which can be considered as part of the geographical approach that is outlined in objective 4.
 14. The Children and Young People’s Commissioning Executive has been overseeing the development of the needs assessment, strategy and delivery plan and has agreed the continuation of a small multiagency task group, meeting twice a year, to monitor the implementation and impact of this strategy. The Public Services Board will receive an annual update.
 15. The strategy will continue to be led by the Children and Young People’s Commissioning Executive, supported by the Corporate Directors for Children and Education and Public Health and Wellbeing however moves are being considered to locate leadership of this strategy closer to Economic Development.

Environmental and climate change considerations

16. The national 2020 Reducing Child Poverty Strategy highlights a number of building blocks that need to be put in place to generate positive change. As the Energy, Change and Opportunity (ECO) team is currently working on

reducing fuel poverty and improving the energy efficiency of properties in Wiltshire, there are a number of common synergies between these work streams related to health, financial support and housing aspects.

17. Highlighting one example from the work of the ECO Team, the Warmer Wiltshire insulation scheme has recently been expanded to provide grants for a selection of families with young children. This will assist them to save money on energy bills and provide a healthier living environment. Whilst reducing fuel poverty does not necessarily result in children moving out of poverty, it is an integral component.
18. Greater engagement with the ECO Team during the term of this strategy would assist in highlighting some cross cutting projects that could be used to achieve collective goals.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

19. The strategy supports greater inclusion and sets objectives to improve outcomes for people in many vulnerable groups (see the “Children at Greatest Risk of Poverty section in the needs assessment) who are more likely to be at risk of living in poverty. The implementation of the strategy will result in reducing the inequality gaps and promoting cohesive communities.

Risk Assessment

20. There are risks related to achieving a reduction in child poverty in Wiltshire during the three years lifetime of this strategy, many of which are difficult to mitigate locally. For example, the current economic downturn heightens the risk of more families living in poverty; the introduction of the universal credit and Work Programme should be positive and help people to optimise their benefits and find appropriate paid employment however there may be unforeseen consequences to the changes.
21. The introduction of the Universal Benefit also means that the measurement of families in poverty could shift slightly making monitoring difficult. The current measures combine information from child tax credits, income support and job seekers allowance.
22. The key strategic objectives in this strategy fit well with the national strategy and so help to support the central government approach. They support early intervention, educational achievement, promoting work, financial inclusion and localised approaches.

Financial Implications

23. There is no new money directly tied to this strategy. Objectives 1 – 3 of the strategy include programmes of work that are already funded by the Council, NHS Wiltshire and their partners. Many other services are provided throughout the voluntary and community sectors, some of which are funded by the local public sector agencies but others that attract funding from elsewhere.

24. The greater funding implication is to the nation from the direct and indirect costs of supporting families in poverty who historically have a range of poorer outcomes.

Legal Implications

25. Under the Child Poverty Act 2010, the Local Authority is required to work towards reducing child poverty through cooperation with its partners and the production of a needs assessment and local strategy.

Options Considered

26. There are no alternative options to consider as it is a statutory requirement for each area to develop and publish a needs assessment and strategy.

Conclusions

27. The approval and implementation of this strategy will provide a framework for reducing child poverty and mitigating its effects over the next 3 years. It will encourage a focus on child poverty, good multiagency working and improve outcomes for children and young people in Wiltshire.

Proposal

28. To approve the Reducing Child Poverty Strategy and draft delivery plan.

Carolyn Godfrey

Corporate Director, Children and Education

Maggie Rae

Corporate Director, Public Health and Wellbeing

Report Author:

Lynda Cox, Head of Performance and Information Management, Department of Children and Education

Alison Bell, Consultant in Public Health, NHS Wiltshire

June 2011

Background Papers

Feedback from consultation

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Summary of consultation feedback

Appendix 2 – Needs Assessment

Appendix 3 – Reducing Child Poverty Strategy

Appendix 4 – Draft high-level Delivery Plan