

Wiltshire Council

Childrens Select Committee

Date of meeting: 14th October 2014

Subject: Reducing Child Poverty Strategy 2014 – 2020

Background

1. The purpose of this item is to present an update on the Wiltshire Child Poverty Strategy 2014-20.
2. Reducing child poverty has been a government target for many years. The [Child Poverty Act](#), which commits this and future governments to eradicating child poverty by 2020, received Royal Assent in March 2010 tasking local areas to produce a child poverty needs assessment and strategy. This strategy document fulfils that requirement.
3. This strategy has been developed by the multi-disciplinary Child Poverty Group which reports to the Wiltshire Children & Young People's Trust Executive. The strategy was made available for wide consultation with the public including children and young people, the public and private sector, businesses and voluntary sector organisations. All responses were considered and inform the final strategy.
4. A child poverty needs assessment sits alongside this strategy and a summary of its main findings is included in the strategy. A copy of the full needs assessment is available as an appendix to this report.
5. The aim of the strategy is to reduce the number of children in Wiltshire living in poverty in addition to mitigating the impacts of poverty on children's health and wellbeing.
6. Children are said to be living in relative income poverty if their household's income is less than 60 per cent of the median national income.
7. Today in the UK 17% of children, 2.3 million, live in poverty. This is one of the highest rates in the industrialised world. Growing up in poverty is known to have a profound impact on children's physical and mental health, on educational attainment, aspirations, well-being, and long term economic productivity.

8. Certain lifestyle and situational factors can increase the risk that a child will live in poverty, and should be considered at a local level where possible in any strategy to tackle child poverty¹:

- Lone parents
- Large families
- Children with disabilities
- Children with disabled parents
- Children who are carers
- Children who have teenage parents
- Children growing up in social housing
- Black and minority ethnic children
- Asylum seekers
- Traveller and gypsy children
- Children with a parent in prison
- Children leaving care

Child Poverty Needs Assessment 2014

9. Whilst Wiltshire is considered to be a generally prosperous area, there are pockets of deprivation that are often hidden in official statistics.

10. An analysis by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) demonstrated that in 2011 Wiltshire had 11,610 children living in poverty, which represents 11.4% of all children in Wiltshire.

11. Worklessness and low paid work are key factors in child poverty. The percentage of children living in workless households in Wiltshire in 2012 was 8%, this compares well to the national average of 14.9%, and the South West regional average of 11.2%. However, this figure varies significantly by community area, from the lowest percentage in Malmesbury where 6% of households with dependent children have no adult in employment to Westbury where 12.8% of households with dependent children have no adult in employment.

12. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to leave school without qualifications. Local authorities measure the attainment gap to enable comparison with other areas. The first key measure of attainment is at the Foundation Stage Profile which measures achievements of children aged 5 against assessment scales (32% gap). There are subsequent measures at Key Stage 2 (23% gap) and GCSE level (36% gap) for children who are eligible for free school meals compared with children who are not eligible. Across all three measures there is a percentage difference or "gap" and this gap is increasing (note, however, that changes to testing took place during 2012 meaning year to year comparisons should be made with caution).

¹ Children at Greatest Risk of Poverty available at <http://www.childpovertytoolkit.org.uk/At-Greatest-Risk-of-Child-Poverty>

13. Getting to work, school or college and accessing services is all dependent on transport. Poor public transport can mean that low income families face reduced choice or difficulties accessing services, employment and support - or are forced into car ownership (reducing the money they have available to spend on other things). 44% of rural households have access to an hourly or better weekday daytime bus service, 89% to a daily or better weekday service.
14. National data suggests that children of teenage mothers have a 63% increased risk of being born into poverty, compared to babies born to mothers in their twenties. Analyses by deprivation show that there are significantly more conceptions in the most deprived quintile and the correlation is even more pronounced when looking just at births. Figures for 2011 and 2012 show that 35.7% of conceptions occurred in the most deprived fifth of Wiltshire's population.
15. In the UK, as is the case in most other high income countries, obesity is more prevalent in the lowest income quintile. Whilst the overall NCMP results for Wiltshire are encouraging there are clear deprivation gradients across all years and measures of weight within Wiltshire. In reception year for example 24.3% of children in the most deprived quintile were overweight or obese compared to 18.4% in the least deprived quintile.
16. A copy of the full needs assessment is embedded within Appendix 1 of this report.

Reducing Child Poverty Strategy 2014 – 2020

17. Child poverty features as a priority in key top-level Wiltshire documents. It is in the Wiltshire Assembly's "People, Places and Promises: Wiltshire Community Plan 2011-2026" which was adopted in April 2011. It is included in Wiltshire Council's 2013-2017 Business Plan through priorities to protect those who are most vulnerable, boost the local economy and bring communities together to enable and support them to do more for themselves. In addition, the Wiltshire Children and Young People's Trust (comprised of representatives from key children's services in Wiltshire) specifically states in its vision a commitment to "reduce, prevent and mitigate the effects of child poverty" – and this is reflected in its Children & Young People's Plan 2012-2015 and in the various commissioning strategies which sit underneath it.
18. This strategy supports both the reduction of child poverty in Wiltshire and mitigation of the effects of child poverty. It seeks to provide a view of the causes, barriers and challenges of child poverty, set a shared vision and encourage a coordinated approach to address child poverty and its impact.
19. Child poverty is a complex issue and benefits from an integrated approach. Specific groups of people will be more vulnerable and will gain from a targeted action. The following key priorities are identified to improve the delivery of services and the lives of some of the more vulnerable families in Wiltshire.

Objective 1 – Provide effective support to vulnerable families with 0-5 year olds

Evidence suggests that children's lives are significantly shaped during their first 5 years of life so it is vital to support the optimum physical, psychological, emotional, social and educational development of children. As stated earlier in this report, activities will be coordinated with the Early Intervention sub group to ensure work is fully collaborative and informed – with no duplication of efforts.

Objective 2 – Narrowing the Educational Attainment Gap

A child's education is key to ensuring that they have appropriate knowledge and skills for the future and that they are prepared for working life. A culture for learning is key together with early identification of vulnerable children and targeted support both within school and from other agencies. In Wiltshire there is continued focus on the attainment of vulnerable groups of children and young people at various stages of their development. The Vulnerable Learners Action Group is in place to set out the strategy and specific initiatives to close these gaps.

Objective 3 – Develop an inclusive economy that will enable equality of economic opportunity for all

Worklessness is a major cause of children living in poverty. The Education, Employment and Skills Strategy for Wiltshire is currently being finalised.

Objective 4 – Provide locally-focused support based on a thorough understanding of needs

Due to the dispersed nature of child poverty in Wiltshire and the broad ways in which poverty manifests itself there is a need for a comprehensive assessment to understand the needs in areas where child poverty is identified as a key priority within the Community Area Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. This enables a holistic view and helps to identify opportunities to more effectively target and coordinate multi-agency support.

Objective 5 – Promote engagement with the Child Poverty Strategy and related implementation plan

It is important to promote and progress the aims of this strategy and maintain engagement from partner agencies, including the private and voluntary sectors. It is also important practitioners are aware of child poverty and recognise the signs when assessing a child and family's needs.

Child Poverty Strategy Implementation Plan and Monitoring Arrangements

20. Reducing child poverty requires a truly collaborative approach and therefore implementing this strategy will involve actions from a number of agencies including the voluntary and private sectors. The complexity of the cause and effects of child poverty mean that it is often difficult to directly attribute specific actions to specific impact.
21. The Child Poverty Group are currently developing the implementation plan to support the delivery of the objectives the strategy. This Plan will bring together work from across the council and partner agencies to tackle this issue.
22. The Child Poverty Group have been asked to compile a range of indicators in a 'scorecard' which will be regularly reported to the Children & Young People's Trust (either in its own right or amalgamating with the Trust's own scorecard).

Appendix 1

Child Poverty Needs Assessment 2014:

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/consultation-wilts-child-poverty-needs-assessment.pdf>

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