



CHILD POVERTY:

Tackling Child Poverty Task And Finish Group
October 2009

“This should be the best place to grow up”

Foreword

When the Association agreed to set up this Task & Finish Group, Cllr Chris McEwan, Darlington Borough Council said,

“Tackling child poverty? This is precisely the kind of issue that persuaded me to get actively involved in politics and stand for election as a councillor in the first place – so I could do something about it.”

This sentiment is echoed throughout the North East. There is a drive and determination amongst politicians at all levels and in all political parties to eradicate child poverty, once and for all. Councillors right across the region will be using their ward surgeries, their lobbying and partnership skills and their corporate responsibilities to tackle this most challenging of issues, on a daily basis.

In the North East, we have a long history of partnership working across the public, private and voluntary and community sectors. The Association will continue to build on this strength and work closely with the North East Child Poverty Coalition, which brings many key partners together in a single grouping – so that we can channel our efforts to those areas where we can make a real difference across the region.

The challenge of tackling child poverty is very real. New legislation will soon establish local government’s leadership role, working with partners, to tackle the issue. The work that the Association has so far done, through this report, is a start and, I hope, a significant contribution as we strive to make this region the ‘best place to grow up’.



**Cllr Mick Henry, Chair,
Association of North East Councils**



Introduction

The title of the report, adopted from the North East Child Poverty Coalition, encapsulates the ambition of councillors in setting up the Task & Finish Group to look at child poverty. Child poverty still blights the North East. This report, with a range of recommendations for local government, partner agencies and the Government, is intended to promote action on a number of fronts to help reduce and ultimately eradicate child poverty from the region.

Councillors on the Task & Finish Group were acutely aware that the child poverty challenge is significant. It is deep-rooted, highly complex and requires a concerted effort by so many people at all levels in our organisations, from political leaders and chief executives, to front-line staff who can spot opportunities to make life just that little bit easier for some of our most vulnerable children and families.

With this in mind, it was never possible to examine all aspects of child poverty. Some areas, like the economy as a sustainable route out of poverty, would require a Task & Finish Group of its own. Councillors had a clear challenge: to identify a small number of areas where we could examine specific themes in some detail and arrive at some recommendations for action.

Our work through the Association's Task & Finish Group is just a start. There are many more areas to consider that were beyond the scope of this work. We know that this work has provided a stimulus for others in the region. For example, this report is being used to support reviews of Sustainable Community Strategies, scrutiny reviews of child poverty and councils' preparations for meeting the challenges of the new Child Poverty legislation. All of this, of course, builds on the excellent work already being undertaken over many years by the region's councils and partners in

tackling child poverty and the case studies set out in this report provide a small illustration of what is being done locally.

The title of this report, "This should be the best place to grow up", is the vision for tackling child poverty adopted by the North East Child Poverty Coalition. In working towards that vision, the Coalition has identified four over-arching themes to shape its work and in recognition of the value of working in partnership to eradicate child poverty, the recommendations in this report have been summarised in an appendix under those themes which are: **BEST START**-All children in the North East have the best start in life; **BEST SUPPORT**-All parents in the region have the resources and skills to provide for their children's needs; **BEST SERVICES**-All children in the region are supported by the best services offering the best opportunities; and **BEST PLACES**-All communities in the region will be places where all children have opportunities to realise their potential.

There are also opportunities to share our work with and learn from colleagues in the European Union as part of "2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion".

Councillors on the Task & Finish Group were united in wanting to ensure all councillors use all opportunities to take steps to eradicate child poverty from our region.



Cllr Pamela Hargreaves
Chair, Task & Finish Group

Child Poverty – The Context

National Policy Framework

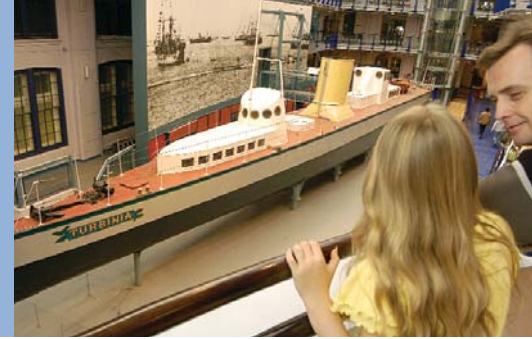
Since announcing its aim in 1999 of eradicating child poverty by 2020 the Government has pursued a national strategy based on:

- An economic strategy to maximise employment;
- Policies to encourage entry to work – the New Deals;
- Policies designed to make work pay including the national minimum wage, improvements in in-work benefits (child benefits, child tax credits, working tax credits and child care tax credits);
- Improvements in out of work benefits;
- Large increases in public expenditure on education, health, transport and childcare.

In 2007 the Government set up the Child Poverty Unit (CPU) to bring together key officials in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and HM Treasury. The CPU has developed a range of pilot schemes to test and explore new approaches to tackling child poverty. The 2008 Budget provided £125 million from 2008–2011 for this activity to enable local authorities, with their partners, to develop innovative approaches to tackling child poverty tailored to their local context. In the North East the following schemes are part of these pilot activities:

- *Tyne Gateway Partnership – Community Entrepreneurs* joint project in North and South Tyneside (see case study below)
- *Work-focused Services in Children’s Centres* are being established in Redcar and Cleveland (see case study below).
- *Child poverty Family Intervention Projects* are being established in Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, and South Tyneside
- Newcastle has been awarded Beacon status on *Preventing and Tackling Child Poverty*.

Government policy on child poverty is comprehensive covering almost every sphere of life, including housing, financial inclusion, health, transport, education, parenting and many other things. Tackling child poverty involves cross-Government effort. While the child poverty target is owned by HM Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions, it is clear that several other departments have major contributions to make. As well as the income poverty headline targets, other targets have been set through the national Public Service Agreements and the negotiation of Local Area Agreements for health, employment, education, social care and transport which have resonance with the child poverty and social inclusion agenda.



Following publication of *Every Child Matters*, children's services were brought together under a new Minister for Children and Families. These changes supported more joined-up policy development and delivery for early years services, education, parenting support and wider children's services. *Every Child Matters* highlights the Government's aim of putting support for parents and carers at the heart of its approach to improving outcomes for children, and its wish to create more and better universal and targeted services open to families as and when they need them. The Government's vision is for all parents to be supported in their parenting roles, and to have access to universal parenting support in the form of information and advice. This approach is targeted on the social aspects of child poverty.

In June 2009 the Government introduced a draft Child Poverty Bill which will enshrine its commitment to eradicate child poverty in legislation. As well as providing a definition of what child poverty eradication means and how it will be measured the Bill makes a number of key proposals. It commits the government to producing a national strategy to provide a cross departmental drive for sustained action addressing issues affecting child poverty. To support and direct the national strategy a national commission of independent experts will be set up to advise the Government. To ensure child poverty remains a priority and that Government is accountable for it, annual progress reports will be produced. To ensure local action on child poverty by local authorities and their partners there is also a requirement that local authorities lead on the production of a local needs assessment and local strategies for child poverty. To ensure others are committed and contribute to this the Bill will include a duty to cooperate on a list of named bodies.

The Regional Challenge

There are at least four reasons why child poverty matters. First, poverty damages the lives of children. Second, poor children tend to become poor adults. Third, poor adults tend to produce poor children. Fourth, this creates a cycle of poverty that causes major damage to society. The latest available data on the Government's standard relative income poverty measure (household income below 60% of the contemporary mean) shows that for 2007/08, before taking into account housing costs, 28% of children in the North East were at risk of being in poverty. This represents a total of 140,000 children. If housing costs were taken into account these figures rise to 33% and 165,000 respectively.

In this region the child poverty rate is, amongst the different household categories, highest in lone parents (46%), workless families (66%) and tenants of social landlords (58%). Poverty is not exclusive to these household types. Data shows that 52% of the region's poor children live in 'couple' families, 45% have a parent in employment and 33% live in homes which are owned by the parent / carer. Data derived from the Family Resources Survey shows that children in the North East experience levels of deprivation second only to London in the areas such as not having sufficient bedrooms, not having at least a 1 week holiday away from home each year and not having friends coming around for meals.

Data on the proportions of children living in households dependent on out of work benefits shows the region has one of the highest rates nationally. The pattern of this also varies across the region in distribution and patterns of concentration. CLG data on child well-being also shows, across the different aspects of well-being, the region rates poorly nationally and with similar variations in distribution. This makes the need for greater flexibility and targeting of child poverty interventions at a local level of greater importance.

Case Study: Tyne Gateway Partnership – Community Entrepreneurs National Pilot Project

North and South Tyneside Councils were jointly awarded over £1.5m by DCSF for a project to tackle child poverty. The project is delivered by a joint LSP Board called the 'Tyne Gateway Partnership' and aims to recruit 20 parents or carers to become 'community entrepreneurs' who will work in their own neighbourhoods to develop their own pathways out of poverty. Through the existing local authority, health and voluntary / community services over 50 local people have been identified who were already working to improve things for families and children. From these 50, 30 have been selected to take part in a course specifically designed for this project.

The course involves helping people recognise and develop their personal strengths, deal with challenges and difficulties, improve their basic skills, job application and interview skills as well as identifying how they would like to improve their communities. Half way through the course they will be able to apply for one of the 20 full time posts. Those appointed will work as a team across the two authorities, making the

links between all public sector services in deprived areas, increasing take up of key benefits, and creating route-ways into employment opportunities in partnership with local employers in the public and private sector. Working across the two authorities as one team is important as expanding the boundaries – both geographic and aspirational – is an important part of broadening the opportunities open to children and families in the area.

For the Community Entrepreneurs, making this big step into employment is a significant challenge and so they will be supported by tailored packages of work-based learning, family support and mentoring by senior council officers. Commencing in 2010 they will undertake the first level of a Foundation degree in 'Community Entrepreneurship' which will make the links between community development, economic development and family support. Each Community Entrepreneur will then work with up to 10 families in their own neighbourhoods and begin to build their 'pathways out of poverty' – whether they be through increasing access to services for families, skills development to link with local employment opportunities or supporting new business ideas.

Case Study: Redcar and Cleveland 'Pathways to Prospects'

Redcar and Cleveland Council successfully bid to become one of 10 national 'Work Focussed Services in Children's Centres' projects. The child poverty pilot builds upon an established successful partnership between Children's Centres and Jobcentre Plus. The pilot targets parents who are at varying stages of readiness for employment. Some parents experience a deficit in the basic employment skills e.g. self-confidence or basic literacy skills whilst others will almost be ready to start work. The target group of parents will consist of a mixture of families who are



already accessing Children's Centres plus those whose first contact with the centre will be through this pilot.

Following stakeholder and community launch events in January 2009 at each of the three pilot Children's Centres many parents signed up to the pilot. Each centre has a full time Jobcentre Plus Advisor, (Pathways to Prospects Advisor), who work as part of the multi-disciplinary team in the Children Centres. These Advisors are linked, as an integral part, to all current service delivery to raise communities' knowledge of this enhanced service.

The Pathways to Prospects Advisors work with Project Workers who have been specifically recruited to take part in the programme. It is the responsibility of the Project Worker to ensure that all families are able to access the pilot, with a special focus on vulnerable families and those who may be considered hard to reach. Each parent has a Personalised Intervention Plan (PIP) which is outcome based and focuses on moving successfully into or towards employment. The PIP includes an individual Learning and Development Programme linked to an employment pathway.

Through the project it is anticipated that an increased number of families, including the hard to reach, will access services and training designed to raise self esteem and support the development of basic skills. There will also be an increased number of parents participating in the Children's Centres volunteer programme and parents will have appropriate support from the Children's Centre Employment Buddy scheme to ensure that the Children's Centre Employment Services are tailored to meet individual need. In addition the Pathways to Prospects Advisor will support parents to make significant and measurable steps towards gaining employment. Parents who are successfully employed will receive continued support from the programme for as long as needed. As of September 2009, 167 individuals have

engaged in the pilot with nine offered employment and 14 volunteers recruited. In addition 56 people are engaged in training and an increasing number of families have been provided with support to access correct benefits and manage debts and 20 parents have been supported with applications and shortlisted for interview at Tesco for a "family friendly" shift.

Case Study: Northumberland Community Trust based services to tackle poverty

Northumberland County Council is committed to transforming the way that it does business. The commitment is to develop community focused services with the capacity and capability to understand fully and address comprehensively the needs and requirements of families and households.

The aim is to develop Community Trust arrangements that will, with support and challenge from the centre, be enabled to define local priorities and then shape and commission services to deliver better outcomes.

A proof of concept pilot is being supported in Berwick where poverty has been defined as a key issue. The Berwick Community Trust will bring together partners to form a task and finish group, from such organisations as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), the Children's Centre, the Integrated Social Care Team, Schools, Community Policing and Safety, the voluntary and community sector and others to develop shared and integrated approaches to poverty including information, advice and guidance; community awareness raising on issues relating to poverty; staff briefings on welfare rights; community transport and childcare plans designed to ameliorate the impact of poverty; and the promotion of free school meals eligibility and take-up.

The need to address the causes as well as the effects of poverty

Two key issues were agreed early on by the Task & Finish Group in relation to the overall approach to tackling child poverty. First, the Group was clear that it was important to examine the causes and effects of child poverty. Members agreed that it was not simply an economic issue of household income levels, but that many aspects of social, economic and environmental policy may impact on child poverty, reflecting local government's wider societal role and the role of partner agencies. In particular, Members were keen to ensure that poverty of aspiration and opportunity were noted as key to breaking the cycle of inter-generational poverty. Linked to this, it was noted that the term 'child poverty' may not be adequate as the child may be in poverty due to the circumstances of the family. It was agreed to ensure the work of the Group reflected family poverty.

Benefits

The Group considered a range of issues in relation to the benefit system, noting the economic downturn may require changes to the way benefits are administered and the way services are provided. The region was represented on the Government's independently chaired Child Poverty Taskforce, by Newcastle's Welfare Rights Manager. Early findings of the Taskforce were that benefits and tax credits are essential to tackling poverty. The Government provides financial support to make sure that work pays and help families who cannot work. The tax and benefit system is designed to provide help for all, and extra help for those who need it most, whilst still maintaining incentives to work.

Many families fail to take up the financial support that they are entitled to as demonstrated by the following Taskforce figures.

| Take up by non-pensioner benefit units 2006/7 | Expenditure (% of national budget for each benefit actually spent) |
|---|--|
| Income Support | 87% - 95% |
| Housing Benefit | 84% - 92% |
| Council Tax Benefit | 75% - 84% |
| Jobseeker's Allowance (income based) | 52% - 64% |
| Child Tax Credit | 89% - 93% |
| Working Tax Credit | 79% - 85% |

Further work undertaken in the region to estimate the impact of this in the North East suggests some significant under-claiming of benefits with consequently major impacts on the local economy.

According to figures generated by Government Office North East, estimates of unclaimed benefits¹ in this region are in the range of £501 and £894m p.a. (based on 2006/07 figures). A Local Multiplier (LM3) tool has been developed by New Economics Foundation (NEF) to calculate the multiplier effect in the local economy. It has worked with Newham Council Social Regeneration Unit in London and Lancashire County Council on benefit take up. Newham calculated an LM3 score of 1.77 which means that each £1 spent generates £1.77 in the local economy. If the LM3 score of 1.77 is replicated in the North East, the benefit to the economy could be between £887m and £1.58bn p.a. at 2006-07 levels.

¹ Estimated unclaimed council tax and housing benefits, pension credit, income support, job seekers allowance, working tax credit and child tax credit



The Government Taskforce noted that barriers to take-up include:

- Complexity of benefit system, lack of knowledge
- Language and literacy problems
- Stigma – mixed messages from Government
- Loss of stability of income
- People aren't always better off – e.g. those with a mortgage
- Problems accessing tax credits and benefit offices for those without landlines
- Lack of affordable childcare

Recommendation: That Government instigates a whole scale review of the tax credit and benefits system with the aim of making the system simpler. This would encourage take-up of entitlements and more closely fit with the overall strategy for helping people off benefits and into work and in turn help to create a culture of work as the norm for the region's children. The review should build into the benefits system more incentives to take up work e.g. around tapering of the reduction in benefit payments to ensure personal incomes rise with paid employment; moves towards a single form for accessing all benefits, with information shared across benefits 'providers'; and become more flexible to respond to families' changing circumstances, e.g. irregular earnings from jobs, so that a stable (but low) income from benefits is not seen as more attractive to families than working. We would welcome the opportunity to work with Government to identify a suitable North East location to pilot new approaches.

Members noted that many front line staff that come into contact with low income families could be better equipped to be alert to ask if they are claiming their full entitlement and to sign-post them on to advice agencies appropriately. This may require certain employers to consider some additional training to integrate child poverty into mainstream activity. The kinds of professional front-line staff would include teachers, children's centre staff, health visitors, etc.

Recommendation: That Children's Trusts be asked to consider a regional approach to increasing the capacity of front-line staff (including voluntary and community sector staff and volunteers) to help increase benefit entitlement take-up.

There are many practical measures that councils and partner agencies can do to help increase benefit take-up. The Task & Finish Group heard from one such authority, Durham, which had successfully implemented a Free School Meals Take-up campaign (see case study).

Case Study: Co Durham free school meals (FSM) take-up campaign

In January 2007 County Durham Welfare Rights Team undertook a campaign to help raise awareness and take-up of free school meals (FSM) across both primary and secondary schools. The aim was to help families in greatest need by addressing child poverty and obesity by increasing take-up of healthy school meals and FSM funding entitlements. As an added financial incentive DCSF funding rules at the time meant that secondary schools above a 20% FSM threshold qualified for additional funds. The campaign was based on a combination of leaflets, posters, press/radio media messages and direct welfare wrights

advice and support targeted at key locations. As a result of the campaign 131 additional FSM allocations were made to secondary school children worth over £40,000 (per annum) to their families and 5 extra secondary schools qualified for DCSF funding equating to over £600,000. In the primary schools an additional 441 extra FSM allocations were made equating to over £137,000 (per annum) of payments to families in greatest need.

The benefits of this campaign have informed a further Free School Meals initiative in Durham, in conjunction with the Primary Care Trust – see the 'health' section.

Recommendations: That councils, through LSPs, the Regional Welfare Rights Managers' Network and partners including Jobcentre Plus, instigate a range of practical take-up campaigns and initiatives including consideration of installing a free to use telephone in certain locations for potential claimants to access benefits, removing the barrier of the cost of phone calls to apply, and the availability of space for welfare rights staff to confidentially discuss benefits issues with potential claimants.

That the DWP be encouraged to implement the Government's Social Security Advisory Committee guidance to adopt the '03' telephone code for all enquiries for its benefits as a way of removing cost of calls as a barrier.

The Task & Finish Group noted that part of the responsibility for removing stigma lies with Government. Whilst Government campaigns to both increase take-up of benefits, e.g. Working Family Tax Credits, and to reduce benefit fraud are both laudable in their own right, care is needed to ensure the timing of both and the messages portrayed do not add to stigma associated with benefits and claimants, thus deterring some families claiming their entitlement. The Government's Child Poverty Unit should be asked to consider this given its cross-Government remit.

Recommendation: That the Child Poverty Unit be asked to co-ordinate, across Government Departments, publicity campaigns around benefits (take-up and anti-fraud) to minimise stigma, under the "Real Help Now" banner.

Finally, it was noted that the most effective way to increase take-up of benefits is through dedicated face-to-face support. Public and voluntary & community sector provision is stretched to capacity, especially in the current recession. The role of other agencies in supporting benefits take-up should be considered in more detail and the Government may wish to consider commissioning research into the wider social, health and economic impacts of benefit take-up campaigns. The following examples focus on health, although the same may be applied to other parts of the public sector.

In relation to health, there is some evidence that there are some real health benefits to be derived from increased take-up, indicating that multi-agency funding for welfare rights services should be considered. Research by Moffatt and Scambler, (Ageing and Society, 2008, Cambridge University Press) found that through increased take-up of benefits amongst the older population, 'the impact of additional resources was considerable and included: increased affordability of necessities and occasional



expenses; increased capacity to cope with emergencies; and reduced stress related to financial worries'. Further research would be required to test whether health benefits would be derived amongst children and families where benefit take-up campaigns are aimed at them.

Research by Reading, Steel and Reynolds (2002, Blackwell Science Ltd, *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 28,1) into the impact of Citizens Advice in primary care for families with young children concluded that 'it may have positive effects on maternal and child health' and 'an advice service is a useful component of primary health care for young families'.

Finally, a systematic review of the health, social and financial impacts of welfare rights advice delivered in healthcare settings (Adams et. al. see <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/6/81>) looked at 55 separate studies as part of its review and concluded, 'there is evidence that welfare rights advice delivered in healthcare settings results in financial benefits. There was little evidence that the advice resulted in measurable health or social benefits. This is primarily due to a lack of good quality evidence, rather than evidence of an absence of effect'.

Recommendation: That the region's Institute for Local Governance and Centre for Translational Research in Public Health be asked to liaise to ensure that research is carried out into the health (and other) gains of increased welfare benefits take-up amongst children and families in poverty.

Although there was not the scope in the Task & Finish Group to explore employability as a route out of poverty, the following case study is offered as just one example of a project aimed at supporting families off benefits and into work.

Case Study: Families Work, Gateshead

The Child Poverty Initiative project was delivered in 2008-9 and was established to target employability interventions to households and families, in particular those with a household income of less than £20,000 per annum. The project differed from existing mainstream provision, which mainly targeted residents on benefits and not those whose partners were claiming benefit on their behalf.

The project aimed to provide a direct contribution to the Regional Employability Framework by working to reduce the number of working age families with children dependent on key benefits. It aimed to promote formal childcare and the benefits of accessing this to enable beneficiaries to return to work. Specifically the project aims to contribute to halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020, reducing the proportion of children living in households where no-one is working, helping 70% of lone parents back into work and encouraging second earners in the family and increase the take up of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit.

The project was delivered by the Family Learning department of Gateshead MBC and was promoted within a range of community centres and venues across the target areas but was focused on three centres in the Borough. The project was successful in coordinating delivery with existing events at the three community centres, taking advantage of opportunities to engage with target clients on an informal basis. The informal and flexible approach adopted (Childcare Chats) proved effective in engaging with target clients and signposting them to available support.

Engaged clients were encouraged to attend a weekly Families Work training scheme. This was an effective method of encouraging the clients to take more ownership of their own learning and also provided benefits in terms of strong retention rates. Childcare was provided on-site at each of the community venues. This was critical as many of the clients had limited experience of placing their children in the care of others.

The project engaged with a total of 118 people in community settings of which 65 had taken part in Childcare Chat sessions and been provided with relevant information about childcare. Of these 20 beneficiaries enrolled on and completed a Families Working Together course, as a result 15 of these enrolled on further courses including Family Maths (10 week course) and/or Happy and Healthy Eating (6 week course).

Early Years and child care

Members examined the approach taken by staff at New Silksworth Infant School, Sunderland as a means to helping to alleviate child poverty.

Case Study: New Silksworth Infant School, Sunderland

New Silksworth Infant School has developed a family centred approach to learning. A DVD has been produced showing how this was achieved featuring contributions from staff, parents and the children themselves. The process started with an all staff training day which identified that the children should be at the centre of learning through a teacher, child and family philosophy. Through this the school has developed different expertise including areas such as health.

The school provides a completely flexible service across daycare, nursery and the main school. Through this provision, staff maintain contact with parents and families which is seen as part of the service but also enables the early signs of family difficulties to be picked up. In response to some of these issues, staff have also developed local agreements with other service providers e.g. Jobcentre Plus who come into the school to deliver training and other advisory services directly to parents and carers. Staff have also been successful in getting parents to contribute to school policy and practice through informal coffee mornings. An example of this is the introduction of a 'healthy packed lunch' policy which was developed with direct input from parents.

The child centred approach offered by staff at New Silksworth Infant School was seen as an exemplar and bodies like the RIEP, Schools North East and others should be encouraged to share such examples, especially when backed with hard evidence of the impact that is being made on children's and families' lives.

Of particular concern to the Group, however, was the extent to which services offered by children's centres were reaching the most needy in our communities. The Government's own research in 2005 into the early effectiveness of the Sure Start programme, 'National Evaluation Report', noted that those who were able to make the most of new services and resources were effectively sucking away resources from those in greatest need. There continues to be much anecdotal evidence about how effective Sure Start is at targeting families and children in greatest need, especially in relation to Government policy for blanket coverage. The Task & Finish Group would welcome a commitment to undertake thorough research into this. If the policy towards children's centres is to help boost the outlook for children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, does the profile of children's centre users



reflect this ambition? If not, what are the barriers to ensuring people from more disadvantaged backgrounds can access services and how can they be overcome? Is there sufficient research in this area in the North East?

Recommendation: That the region's Children's Trusts examine the take-up of services through Children's Centres to see if they are delivering benefits to those most in need and, if not, seek to identify and overcome the barriers to achieving this policy objective.

In relation to initiatives that are offered through Children's Centres to support families out of poverty, Stockton Council has 'Together for Children Guidance Advisors' which use referrals from various services to offer parental support.

Case Study: Together for Children Guidance Advisors, Stockton Council

Through different referral routes such as housing services and Jobcentre Plus parents wishing to access training or seeking employment are identified for tailored support. These referrals can range from help with basic to multiple skill needs including employment skills such as numeracy and life skills like building self-confidence. In addition help can be given with more short term practical needs such as preparation of curriculum vitae (CV).

Once identified parents are allocated a Guidance Advisor based at the Children's Centre who holds an initial training and employment guidance session with them. This aims to agree a tailored package of help and support based on existing programmes such as Adult Options and Adult Directions as part of a skills and learning pathway.

The Guidance Advisor works with the parent to identify and source the most relevant and appropriate provision to help with their learning and work goals. The Advisor also offers advice and help with practical issues such as childcare to enable participation in the learning programmes. In developing the learning pathway Advisors are also able to advise and support the parent with other issues which may affect their participation in the programme. This can cover issues such as benefit entitlement, help with housing and other personal wellbeing issues.

The Group noted that the development of policy and funding in relation to childcare and support, through Sure Start and other initiatives, has been incremental and may need a review, especially to ensure that it is consistent with other policies. For example, the provision and funding of childcare could be examined to promote a more flexible system that enables parents to access training etc on a short-term basis (helping to tackle worklessness). Currently, such funding and provision of childcare is geared towards long-term placements for parents already in work.

Attendance at school is seen as being of critical importance for the future prospects of children and their capacity to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty. The Task & Finish Group is keen to support work undertaken by Children's Trusts and others in a co-ordinated approach to boost school attendance.

Parental skills

As an addendum to the work of the Task and Finish group, members have requested that further work be undertaken on the theme of parental skills, covering the whole range of skills required by parents to help break the inter-generational cycle of poverty. This may include parenting skills, basic finance, confidence building and skills to help access training and job opportunities. This was felt to be beyond the scope of the Task and Finish group within its timescales and so it is proposed that the Child Poverty Coalition examines this issue in more detail.

Recommendation: That the Child Poverty Coalition be asked to consider parental skills within the context of tackling child poverty.

Health

Child poverty cuts across many aspects of the commissioning and provision of health services, including but not exclusively in relation to the provision of children's health services. There are many health services involved in helping to break the cycle of child and family poverty, including services around the birth, maternal health, children and young people and services for adults.

The North East has a regional health strategy, Better Health Fairer Health. Child poverty cuts across many of the strategy's themes, including economy, culture and environment; tobacco; obesity, diet and physical activity; alcohol; and, of course, early life. The strategy provides a great opportunity to ensure a consistency of approach between health, local government and all partners in ensuring tackling child poverty is integrated into the public health agenda.

In a presentation by the joint Assistant Director (Commissioning) Stockton PCT and Head of Children and Young People's Strategy, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council it was confirmed that poverty is one of the biggest risk factors linked to poorer health outcomes. Directors of Public Health in the region have said that smoking is the biggest factor in tackling health inequalities. According to Fresh North East, around 10,000 children aged 11-15 smoke in our region - and unless they quit, one in two will die from it. It is the nation's biggest killer and costs the NHS £2.7bn a year.

The NHS Next Stage Review states that poorer children are less likely to be breastfed, more likely to be exposed to tobacco smoke and more likely to be injured on the roads. Young women experience high rates of teenage pregnancy if they come from poorer backgrounds.

It was further reported that in the UK as a whole, those with the highest incomes are currently more likely to get support from health visitors than lower income groups². To illustrate, figures for families receiving support through pregnancy and the early stages of childhood rise from 41.5% of households on incomes of less than £3,000 to 57.4% of households on incomes over £52,000. This is evidence that wealthier people tend to access services more.

In the North East, according to the Information Centre for Non-Medical Workforce Census, between 2004 and 2006 the provision of both health visitors and school nurses fell. Other regions also tended to show a reduction in the numbers of health visitors and, in contrast to the North East, tended to show increases in the numbers of school nurses.

The joint Assistant Director (Commissioning) suggested that a number of conclusions may be drawn from this, including that child preventative services

² Source: Reaching Out: An Action Plan on Social Exclusion, Cabinet Office 2006



need to have high priority. There may be a lack of clarity about what child health services PCTs are expected to commission. Health visitors and school nurses need to be adequately trained and equipped to do the work required by them – a key challenge for World Class Commissioning in respect of children's health services. The NHS may consider setting a target for each locality in the region to have a dedicated resource for commissioning of children's services, to ensure priority vis-à-vis acute and adult services. Mental health and well-being should also be developed as a key priority in Children and Young People's Plans and that support services are integrated at the point of delivery.

Recommendation: The PCTs' World Class Commissioning framework in the region is developed to ensure commissioning in all localities targets outcomes around child health and health inequalities, thus ensuring services are further targeted to areas and communities in greatest need.

Breastfeeding was often cited as a key challenge for tackling health inequalities in the region and is illustrative of the extent of the challenge to tackle health inequalities that is replicated across other outcome areas. Professionals in children's services and health argue that there is a challenge to increase the prevalence of breastfeeding at birth and at 6 weeks. In the North East, 2005 figures show that the rates are around 57% and 32% respectively, the lowest figures for any English Region.

According to the Department of Health, younger mothers, mothers from lower socio-economic groups and mothers with lower educational levels appear to be least likely to initiate and continue breastfeeding. Mothers from these groups are also more likely to introduce solids, follow-on formula and additional drinks at an earlier age – all factors associated with childhood obesity.

Many localities have introduced a range of practical measures to encourage breastfeeding, ranging from posters, leaflets, coffee mornings, home visits, baby clinics, breastfeeding 'peer supporters' etc and there have been numerous national campaigns run, e.g. in National Breastfeeding Awareness Week. There is some evidence that breastfeeding rates are increasing, but the North East still lags behind other regions.

Recommendation: That the Early Life Regional Advisory Group to the Better Health, Fairer Health Strategy continues to prioritise effective approaches to increasing the take-up of breastfeeding.

Members felt that it was important to encourage as many people as possible to access services and facilities through children's centres, to break taboos around venues associated with authority and to increase awareness of services aimed at improving health and tackling inequalities. In particular, it was felt that certain professionals, who already have the confidence of priority families, could be relocated into children's centres. Youth services could become more closely linked to children's centres so that youths, who may become the harder-to-reach adults, are already familiar with the venues, services and facilities. This may be particularly valuable in terms of targeting action around smoking, alcohol misuse and teenage pregnancy services towards younger people.

In the near future, Carer Partnership Managers will be appointed in Jobcentre Plus (one per District) and the Department of Health's Carers Strategy will support the provision of respite care enabling carers to take a route to employment.

³ Source: Infant Feeding Survey 2005

Case Study: Family Nurse Partnership Programme, Darlington and Durham

The Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) Pilot is delivered in Darlington and County Durham through a partnership involving Darlington and County Durham Primary Care Trusts (PCT), Children's Services (DBC) and Children and Young People's Services (Durham County Council). The FNP is an evidence-based nurse home visiting programme designed to improve the health, well-being and self sufficiency of young first time parents and their children. It involves weekly or fortnightly structured home visits by specially trained nurses from early pregnancy until children are 24 months old. The programme is designed for low income mothers who have no previous live births and starts in the second trimester of pregnancy.

Based in Children's Centres a Family Nurse provides a three part programme of support for up to 20 families. The families are from a range of wards, however, the majority live in the poorest wards. The programme delivers structured home visits in close partnership with Community Midwives and consists of three parts with 14 visits during pregnancy, 28 during infancy and 22 visits during 'toddlerhood'.

Although in its early stages the positive effects of this intensive early intervention programme are evident.

- An increase in the self esteem of young parents on the programme
- Young parents engaging in the programme and willing to learn about the development of their child and health related issues.
- Excellent attendance at antenatal appointments
- Greater interest by dads/partners
- Breastfeeding initiation at birth by 59%, with 50% continuing to six weeks.

- 50% of mothers and partners were smoking when recruited onto the Programme; 22% stopped during pregnancy and continue to be non-smokers and 89% choosing to have a smoke-free home.
- Parents have reduced their alcohol intake and have a more responsible attitude to alcohol.

Recommendations: That the extended hours initiative for health services be further developed, especially for GP and dental services, to ensure they are timely and responsive to local circumstances, e.g. local labour market patterns in one locality which may require a different pattern of access to services in other localities.

That, given the high priority given to tackling smoking and excess alcohol consumption through the region's LAAs, the Fresh and Balance regional offices should continue to produce targeted campaigns with a particular focus on reducing tobacco and alcohol use amongst young people, especially smoking during pregnancy.

That action to implement "Aiming High for Disabled Children" is taken by PCTs and local authorities to support breaks and respite for parents and carers of disabled children, but also to support parents' / carers' routes back into training and employment for more sustainable routes out of child and family poverty.

That the provision of ante- and post-natal care and initiatives is reviewed by PCTs to examine if the supply of skills in this area of care to link with strategies for raising aspirations and employment and training opportunities, especially for people in low income households.

That each PCT sets out specific priorities, actions and targets in relation to local health inequalities in



Children and Young People's Plans and that progress towards clearer strategic action in the new plans from 2011 is clearly mapped out.

Case Study - County Durham Free School Meal Pilot – Primary Age Pupils

Working in conjunction with the Primary Care Trust, schools, the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health, Durham County Council has successfully bid to operate a Free School Meals pilot, covering 244 schools and potentially 36,000 pupils, for the period September 2009 to August 2011.

The early signs from the pilot are encouraging with some schools reporting 100% take up. This has been positively embraced by parents and pupils. The financial benefits for families are significant, especially those with 2 and 3 children at £8.75 per pupil per week to pay for school meals.

There is evidence that some pupils previously entitled to a free meal on parental income grounds are now deciding to take a meal and this is especially beneficial to those parents just above the Free School Meals eligibility criteria.

Well fed pupils are expected to learn and behave better, be healthier and the lunch time experience should have social skill spin offs and improve their knowledge of food and choices away from school.

Housing

The new Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) has a key role to play in tackling child (and family) poverty through its strategic role in the region, which goes beyond the obvious investment in social and affordable homes to recognise its ability to influence Registered Social Landlords and others in the delivery of sustainable development and tenancies. It is about tackling 'poverty of place', noting that the many causes and effects of poverty can become synonymous with where people live. Not only is there a need to secure joint working across housing sectors in the provision of housing opportunities and prevention services but also to provide joint and seamless support for those in crisis. Nationally two thirds of homeless households contain children, and 9% of the total is young people leaving care. All housing stakeholders need to be party to the commitment to help create housing and support services to deal with this level of crisis and create sustainable solutions to the housing needs of those in poverty.

The HCA vision states that it will create opportunity:

- For people to live in homes they can afford in places they want to live
- For local authorities and communities to deliver the ambition they have for their own areas

In the North East in 2008, HCA achieved:

- 1,043 new homes for rent
- 262 new homes for sale
- 1,223 starts on site
- 180 homes purchased from developers for rent

The Director of Housing Projects at the HCA reported on three key areas which should be priorities for tackling child and family poverty through housing: worklessness, quality of housing (and places) and stability of neighbourhoods.

First, the investment in housing can be part of a strategy to reduce worklessness in the region. The HCA has a local labour or social clause in many of the construction projects they fund or part fund which encourages local employment and apprenticeships where appropriate. In Eppleton, County Durham, the HCA is working with the Coalfields Regeneration Trust to provide targeted recruitment and training and a Family Employment Initiative. There are other examples of such clauses being developed in the region, including through the Construction Employment Integrator Project which secures local labour in the construction and end-use of capital projects.

Recommendation: That the HCA and local government continue to share their experience and expertise around local labour or social clauses to maximise the impact capital investment in housing can have on up-skilling local people and tackling worklessness.

The current design standards have helped drive up housing quality in the public sector. First, design standards need to be used to help ensure the region matches housing supply to its regional economic aspirations. Design standards are being reviewed; local government should continue to work with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) on reviewing design standards. Specifically in relation to tackling poverty, members noted that housing design and allocation can have a significant impact on family and child aspirations. For example, spare bedrooms allow families to receive visitors to stay, a natural occurrence for many home owners. Having a dedicated dining room, study room etc allow for enhanced family experiences and childhood development.

Recommendations: That the HCA continues to work closely with local authorities and housing partners, as part of its approach to the development of its 10-15 year investment strategies and three year plans that help to alleviate aspects of child poverty, e.g. around decent and zero carbon homes, thus ensuring that strategic decisions are taken with child and family poverty in mind.

That as a follow up to the current decent homes standard, councils should encourage a follow up to the programme that considers future investment in the existing housing stock (i.e. more than 90% of the current housing stock in the UK) to make them more 'liveable' and cheaper to run.

Stability of neighbourhoods is critical to tackling poverty. Families that are forced or choose to move will have their children moved from school to school, breaking circles of friends, reducing their social capital and family support networks.

On renewal, the Mandale Estate in Stockton was an area of housing market failure with a poor reputation, suffering from anti-social behaviour. A 'grass roots' led strategy, building on strong community spirit, is securing mixed tenure, family accommodation combining green infrastructure and public art with homes and neighbourhoods that are desirable. This kind of approach to mixed communities can produce areas that:

- attract and retain households with a wide range of incomes;
- have good quality housing in attractive environments with access to good local schools and retail/leisure facilities and other services such as health;
- have a mix of housing size, type and tenure;
- attract and retain households by choice;
- have strong local economies and contribute to strong regional economies.



Furthermore, good estate management, tenancy support and community services (including environmental and infrastructure care and support) can be promoted as a feature of future housing provision in terms of the legacy of housing investment, ensuring local communities are involved in such schemes. Housing as an asset can be used to generate revenue and benefits in communities, e.g. through the development of non-profit sharing community interest companies, including housing maintenance schemes that target local people to carry out the work, and exploring further the notion of community funds which are generated by local agreements which retain a very small proportion of the sale value of a house when sold or include/apply service charges and divert it into schemes for community benefit.

Members have expressed concern about the behaviour of a minority of private landlords in adding to instability. Although the new Tenant Services Authority does not yet have responsibilities for the private rented sector, it is proposed that early discussions are sought with the TSA around better regulation and moves to improve the poor quality of some private rented stock which is effectively being funded through the public purse, through housing benefits.

Recommendation: That discussions are held with the new Tenant Services Authority aimed at stabilising the housing market, especially in the private rented sector, to minimise the impact upheaval of families through loss of accommodation has on the future prospects (loss of social networks, school friends, disruption to education etc.) of the family and child. It is realised that the TSA will not take responsibility for the private rented sector immediately but early discussion on quality standards and joint working with other providers would be beneficial if property and management thresholds are to be improved.

The recession has also highlighted the importance of the HCA working with local authorities, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) and Registered Social Landlords (RSL) to put schemes and support in place to help avoid families easily losing their homes as a consequence of the economic cycle (noting that stability is a major factor in tackling poverty), encouraging the development of tenancy sustainment services, and providing support and advice for those on low or without earned income.

Affordability of rural housing should continue to be a feature of future discussions between the HCA and local government at different spatial levels, examining the scope for promoting wider use of Community Land Trusts for example which promote the use of homes by local people in property hot-spots where they would be squeezed out of the local housing market without support.

Financial Inclusion

In addition to consideration of the benefits system, members focused discussion on financial inclusion based on three approaches: how landlords can provide holistic support to tenants, including skills development; support for credit unions; and the role of the Regional Financial Inclusion Champions as set out in the following three case studies.

Case Study: Homes for Northumberland and financial inclusion

Homes for Northumberland is the largest social landlord in the county with 9,400 properties. As part of its 'whole service' approach for its tenants they fund a dedicated financial inclusion manager and have developed a financial inclusion strategy. Through this strategy they provide a range of support to tenants to help provide stability within the tenancy, reduce tenancy turnover while also helping to address issues of child and family poverty. This activity also helps them to meet targets for reducing fuel poverty. The strategy is based on two key objectives of maximising tenants' incomes and by promoting and building financial awareness and capability. Maximising income is addressed through ensuring take-up of benefit entitlement and provision of employment support services such as CV and interview preparation. They also provide financial help with initial costs of starting a new job such as additional travel and equipment costs. Through the normal housing contact with tenants, advice and support is also given on accessing and using basic banking accounts, affordable credit (credit unions) and the use of appropriate and affordable insurance services.

Case Study: Hartlepool Credit Union support

Hartlepool Borough Council identified that over 3,000 of its households were without a bank account and that there was generational dependency on door step lenders and loan sharks in some of its most deprived areas. So, working with a local credit union, Hartlepool has incentivised the opening of credit union accounts, into which housing benefit can be paid electronically (a £20 credit is paid by the council). The council is also looking at subsidising the £3 a month charge for the Credit Union Current Account (which gives the individual a visa debit card which can also be used at ATMs to withdraw cash). This account is particularly appealing to people who have difficulty opening or sustaining a mainstream bank account. The Credit Union has developed modern secure banking services (a new current account with VISA ATM card) that is available to many individuals who would often struggle to open a High Street bank account. These accounts provide a vehicle to allow the electronic payment of benefit and also an account into which earnings can be paid when an individual moves off benefit. They also allow direct debit payments by account holders which can remove the risk of excessively high penalty charges for late or missed payments through some existing High Street credit agreements. Since the scheme was launched in January 2009, 163 new accounts have been opened. Not only has this enabled Hartlepool to secure £500,000 of DWP Growth Fund money for the credit union but they are also making their own savings by reducing the need for paper based benefits payments by switching to electronic transfer payments.



Case Study: Regional Financial Inclusion Champions

The region has two financial inclusion champions, funded by government, covering the north and south of the region. Bronwyn Twizell, located with South Tyneside Council, covers the north and Ross Hume, located with Fabrick Housing Group in Middlesbrough, covers the south of the region. The Financial Inclusion Champion (FIC) role has built on the national 'now lets talk money' campaign which was designed to support the government's financial inclusion objectives through the development and implementation of local level action plans. The aim of the work is to provide a lasting legacy that will give the poorest communities and families access to:

- Affordable and responsible credit.
- An appropriate bank account.
- Free face to face money advice.
- Basic home contents insurance.
- Savings accounts.

The two teams aim to add value to existing partnerships and to support the establishment of new partnerships or networks where they are needed. They prioritise with partnerships the issues affecting a community and support them in taking action which will have the greatest impact potential. The FIC not only signpost people to existing financial services but will also work in partnership to develop new services in areas where people do not have access to the facilities others take for granted. The FICs have also been supporting the regional work being lead by ONE North East on identifying 'hotspot' areas in the North East suffering from over-indebtedness and a lack of access to affordable and appropriate credit.

Working with local partnerships and networks the FIC helps them to assess the evidence to establish a base line and mapping of current services allowing the gaps and needs to be identified. Once agreed the local partners develop responses to this including new forms of collaboration and working to meet the shortfalls and increase availability and access to existing and new financial services. Through this they encourage a greater sharing of information and good practice which can lead to influencing change to local and national policy and strategy. This in turn helps to embed change and leave a lasting legacy.

Good practice examples like the Homes for Northumberland Project should be shared across the region to promote the wider role a landlord may have in relation to supporting tenants, through maximising customer income, supporting tenants into training and employment, encouraging the use of credit unions, basic bank accounts and home contents insurance and maintaining contact with tenants.

On the role of credit unions, especially in the wake of the Credit Crunch, members are keen to see the role of credit unions strengthened in the region, tailored to local circumstances. Credit unions need to be established as attractive to paid employees as a way of them building up their asset base so that they can offer more affordable credit and consolidation loans to more vulnerable people. Councils may wish to consider adopting the Hartlepool model and work with existing credit unions to promote their sustainability through appropriate financial measures, e.g. low levels of charging and financial incentives for people to join.

Credit union current accounts can be promoted as a way of accessing cheaper finance (e.g. by opening up internet (cheaper) shopping including price comparison web-sites and making direct debit payments for bills which are often cheaper). This will help cheaper services, which are taken for granted by many, relatively wealthy people, to become accessible for lower income households. Money Advice services may be a way of signposting people to credit unions for financial support and ways out of financial exclusion.

At the same time as the Task & Finish Group was examining financial inclusion, One North East had commissioned some research into the availability of affordable credit, in partnership with the Department of Work and Pensions. Rocket Science, who have been commissioned to undertake the research, was tasked to:

- Identify the current range of services offering affordable credit in the region
- Identify gaps and overlaps in these services
- Identify the level of need for affordable credit, and gaps between the levels of need and provision
- Outline ways in which gaps might be filled
- Identify potential funding models to fill those gaps, and
- Identify potential organisational and governance solutions to meeting those gaps

There are two key recommendations arising from the research which DWP are now seeking to take forward: that there should be fewer, larger credit unions across the region and, given that the amounts that credit unions can lend is limited by the amounts saved with them, that a regional fund be created that credit unions can access to increase the volume of affordable lending.

Localities may wish to consider the role of LSPs in tackling financial exclusion. The Region's Financial Inclusion Champions are keen to support LSPs in this.

Recommendations: That, given the recent publication of the One North East research into affordable credit, local authorities, through the Association and the Financial Inclusion Champions, work in partnership with DWP on a co-ordinated response to the research recommendations.

That, in terms of the sustainability of existing credit unions, council staff and councillors be encouraged to join and make regular payments to their local credit union and that councils use their community leadership role, through LSPs, to encourage other partner agencies to do likewise.

That the Association and the Child Poverty Coalition jointly work on a campaign to lobby Government for changes to improve the regulation of lending including provision of access to low interest consolidation loans to reduce debt levels, tackle extortionately high rates of interest and loan sharking.

It is not yet clear just what the economic impact of a reliance on door step lenders and illegal lenders is for the region. One North East is currently engaged in research to explore the implications of financial exclusion in more detail.

Recommendation: That One North East and local authorities clearly set out and communicate the economic case for promoting credit unions, in recognition of the large sums of money being drained from local economies to fund expensive (and sometimes illegal) loans – a practice referred to as 'welfare benefit leakage'



Performance and Good Practice

The Audit Commission published its final guidance on the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) in February 2009, replacing the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. This was on the back of the publication of the National Indicator Set in 2008. The key change marked by the move to CAA is the intention to move from a set of inspections of organisations or institutions, to a single report on the place. The report would draw on various inspectorates' service reports, e.g. OFSTED, but co-ordinated through the Audit Commission. CAA is about assessing how well a locality is delivering its priorities as set out in its Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement and Audit Commission guidance specifically refers to addressing the needs of vulnerable people. The delivery arm of the community strategy, the Local Area Agreement (LAA), is a set of no more than 35 of the National Indicators (plus statutory Department for Children, Schools & Families indicators) plus optional local indicators that set out the improvements in outcomes each locality has agreed (with central Government) to work towards.

The Group felt it important to ensure that child poverty should be suitably highlighted in community strategies and LAAs and that this, in turn, would be used to ensure progress in tackling child poverty, and its associated story, is covered in CAA. It was further noted that localities use the opportunity to articulate child poverty in a way that reflected local circumstances. It was noted that most of the region's LAAs included the use of the 'child poverty' National Indicator, NI116 "the proportion of children in poverty", either as a national or local indicator, but that all LAAs included a proportion of indicators that reflected each locality's child poverty challenges.

Members identified a potential basket of indicators, primarily drawn from the National Indicator set, which could be used voluntarily by localities in their LAA refresh and preparations for CAA. It was intended that this basket be offered as a tool to support LSPs assess that they have covered all the key targets around child poverty in agreeing local priorities and to support localities in telling their 'story' of child poverty and progress towards reducing it as part of CAA. The basket is attached at Annex C and has been discussed with the LAA Roundtable Group of corporate leads.

It was noted that forthcoming legislation on child poverty may require the basket to be reviewed and it is understood that Government is also working to develop a basket of indicators to support LSPs to understand the wider determinants of child poverty. Work is underway to ensure that members' considerations about a basket of indicators for the North East inform Government's work in this area.

At the conclusion of the Task and Finish group meetings, Government published the Child Poverty Bill. In brief, the Bill sets out requirements for:

- The Government to meet four UK-wide targets relating to relative poverty, combined low income and deprivation, persistent poverty and absolute poverty
- The Government to publish a UK-wide child poverty strategy with annual progress reports to Parliament
- The establishment of an expert commission on child poverty, and
- For local authorities and their partners, a duty to co-operate in tackling child poverty, to prepare a needs assessment and produce a joint child poverty strategy, and for local authorities to take duties under the Bill into account when preparing Sustainable Community Strategies

Recommendation: That a basket of indicators covering the causes and effects of child poverty be used voluntarily by local authorities and partners in their reviews of their sustainable community strategy and LAA, as part of their approach to CAA and in response to forthcoming child poverty legislation.

That all 12 authorities be encouraged to include in their Corporate Self Assessment, their progress and challenges for eradicating child poverty as it relates to their Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement targets.

Both recommendations may assist local authorities and their partners in meeting new duties under the Bill, especially clause 23 on preparation of Sustainable Community Strategies.

As indicated above, all councils are undertaking considerable work aimed at tackling child poverty. Within the region, a number of child poverty 'pilots' have been secured and Newcastle City Council has also secured Beacon Status for its approach to tackling child poverty (see below). Other councils had bid for pilot or Beacon status and, although they may not have secured such status, will be working to implement and deliver their ambitions through other mechanisms. Although the Task & Finish Group did not consider the content of each of the pilots or Beacons, it was noted that the learning that is being developed in all the region's authorities should be captured and shared for the benefit of the region as a whole. Members were keen to ensure that, through the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP) and the Coalition, good practice and learning is shared.

Some of the sharing of good practice and learning from policy developments may be undertaken by corporate leads on child poverty coming together through a new Network which can help councils and partners, especially through Children's Trusts, deliver key targets in the area of child poverty.

At the time of writing, a proposal for the development of this network has been submitted, with the support of the Child Poverty Coalition, through the Children's Services Programme of the RIEP.

Finally, members are keen to ensure that the legacy of the Task & Finish Group includes an action-focused pledge to be signed by a range of agencies that would add value to local pledges already being developed and to their existing work at the local or sub-regional level. This provides an opportunity to highlight a small number of high profile actions that local government and its partners in the public, private and voluntary & community sectors, drawing in key agencies with responsibility for strategy, policy and resources at the regional level. The intention is that each agency would agree a set of actions addressing recommendations contained in this report, plus commitments arising from new child poverty legislation.

Recommendation: That a NE Child Poverty Pledge be developed based on key actions identified through the Task & Finish Group and that regional child poverty-related voluntary and community sector agencies be centrally involved in this work. Barnardo's in the North East has agreed to take a lead role in this work by co-ordinating input from other voluntary and community sector agencies in this regard. It is further recommended that the Child Poverty Coalition be asked to monitor progress towards meeting pledge actions.



Case Study: Newcastle upon Tyne City Council Beacon Award for Preventing and Tackling Child Poverty

The Sure Start Information and Resource Service (IRS) was established in the Cowgate and Blakelaw area of North West Newcastle in 2003 as a targeted service to reduce the number of children living in workless households. The area has high levels of deprivation, low levels of adult qualifications and skills and little social capital. In 2007/8 the IRS worked with 467 parents.

The IRS was initially designed and developed by NCH, and the council's Families Information Service (FIS). It was shaped through analysing need through data relating to the area; consultation with local parents and carers of preschool children to understand their specific needs and what help they needed to become economically active; and identifying existing provision and support services.

It became a pilot for this type of outreach delivery model in Newcastle and has continued to be re-shaped based on feedback from service users, other key partners and external evaluation.

Service description

The IRS focuses on the needs of each individual service user and supports them on their unique journey into work and training. Although some of the support described might seem unimportant to people who are easily able to locate and use services, it is these relatively simple actions that make the service successful in engaging some of the most socially excluded parents out of deprivation.

Development

This successful service is now being delivered within other Children's Centres in Newcastle. To maximise its reach and benefits, training is offered to reception and other staff to improve engagement, standardisation and the quality of advice offered to parents at the first point of contact.

Newcastle City Council was awarded Beacon Status in March 2009

Child poverty signals in the recession

The Group was keen to ensure that local authorities' work to lessen the impact of the recession addressed some key child poverty measures. Members agreed that the following were key issues to track: housing repossessions or homelessness; take-up of free school meals; take-up of child care; referrals to children's services and attendance. It was also noted that the effects of the recession on citizens and communities would be expected to continue for some time after the economy begins to recover. It is proposed that Authorities continue to monitor measures to track the impact of the recession in relation to child poverty.

On-going governance and leadership around child poverty

The Group is concerned to ensure that in the new arrangements for the 12 authorities working together, there should be a facility to monitor progress on tackling child poverty. This could be achieved in a number of ways and amongst other things it was felt important that elected Members should be invited to participate in the Child Poverty Coalition.

Annex A

Summary of Task and Finish Group recommendations, linked to the four strategic themes of the Child Poverty Coalition.

BEST START

That the region's Institute for Local Governance and Centre for Translational Research in Public Health be asked to liaise to ensure that research is carried out into the health (and other) gains of increased welfare benefits take-up amongst children and families in poverty.

That the region's Children's Trusts examine the take-up of services through Children's Centres to see if they are delivering benefits to those most in need and, if not, seek to identify and overcome the barriers to achieving this policy objective.

That the Early Life Regional Advisory Group to the Better Health, Fairer Health Strategy continues to prioritise effective approaches to increasing the take-up of breast-feeding.

That the provision of ante- and post-natal care and initiatives is reviewed by PCTs to examine if the supply of skills in this area of care to link with strategies for raising aspirations and employment and training opportunities, especially for people in low income households.

That each PCT sets out specific priorities, actions and targets in relation to local health inequalities in Children and Young People's Plans and that progress towards clearer strategic action in the new plans from 2011 is clearly mapped out.

BEST SUPPORT

That Government instigates a whole scale review of the tax credit and benefits system with the aim of making the system simpler. This would encourage take-up of entitlements and more closely fit with the overall strategy for helping people off benefits and into work and in turn help to create a culture of work as the norm for the region's children. The review should build into the benefits system more incentives to take up work e.g. around tapering of the reduction in benefit payments to ensure personal incomes rise with paid employment; moves towards a single form for accessing all benefits, with information shared across benefits 'providers'; and become more flexible to respond to families' changing circumstances, e.g. irregular earnings from jobs, so that a stable (but low) income from benefits is not seen as more attractive to families than working. We would welcome the opportunity to work with Government to identify a suitable North East location to pilot new approaches.

That the HCA and local government continue to share their experience and expertise around local labour or social clauses to maximise the impact capital investment in housing can have on up-skilling local people and tackling worklessness.

That, given the recent publication of the One North East research into affordable credit, local authorities, through the Association and the Financial Inclusion Champions, work in partnership with DWP on a co-ordinated response to the research recommendations.

That, in terms of the sustainability of existing credit unions, council staff and councillors be encouraged to join and make regular payments to their local credit union and that councils use their community leadership role, through LSPs, to encourage other partner agencies to do likewise.

That the Association and the Child Poverty Coalition jointly work on a campaign to lobby Government for changes to improve the regulation of lending including provision of access to low interest consolidation loans to reduce debt levels, tackle extortionately high rates of interest and loan sharking.

That One North East and local authorities clearly set out and communicate the economic case for promoting credit unions, in recognition of the large sums of money being drained from local economies to fund expensive (and sometimes illegal) loans – a practice referred to as 'welfare benefit leakage'.

That the Child Poverty Coalition be asked to consider parental skills within the context of tackling child poverty.

BEST SERVICES

That Children's Trusts be asked to consider a regional approach to increasing the capacity of front-line staff (including voluntary and community sector staff and volunteers) to help increase benefit entitlement take-up.

That councils, through LSPs, the Regional Welfare Rights Managers' Network and partners including Jobcentre Plus, instigate a range of practical take-up campaigns and initiatives including consideration of installing a free to use telephone in certain locations for potential claimants to access benefits, removing the barrier of the cost of phone calls to apply, and the availability of space for welfare rights staff to confidentially discuss benefits issues with potential claimants.

That the DWP be encouraged to implement the Government's Social Security Advisory Committee guidance to adopt the '03' telephone code for all enquiries for its benefits as a way of removing cost of calls as a barrier.

That the Child Poverty Unit be asked to co-ordinate, across Government Departments, publicity campaigns around benefits (take-up and anti-fraud) to minimise stigma under the "Real Help Now" banner.

That the PCTs' World Class Commissioning framework in the region is developed to ensure commissioning in all localities targets outcomes around child health and health inequalities, thus ensuring services are further targeted to areas and communities in greatest need.

That the extended hours initiative for health services be further developed, especially for GP and dental services, to ensure they are timely and responsive to local circumstances, e.g. local labour market patterns in one locality which may require a different pattern of access to services in other localities.

That, given the high priority given to tackling smoking and excess alcohol consumption through the region's LAAs, the Fresh and Balance regional offices should continue to produce targeted campaigns with a particular focus on reducing tobacco and alcohol use amongst young people, especially smoking during pregnancy.

That action to implement "Aiming High for Disabled Children" is taken by PCTs and local authorities to support breaks and respite for parents and carers of disabled children, but also to support parents' / carers' routes back into training and employment for more sustainable routes out of child and family poverty.

That all 12 authorities be encouraged to include in their Corporate Self Assessment, their progress and challenges for eradicating child poverty as it relates to their Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement targets.

That a NE Child Poverty Pledge be developed based on key actions identified through the Task & Finish Group and that regional child poverty-related voluntary and community sector agencies be centrally involved in this work. Barnardo's in the North East has agreed to take a lead role in this work by co-ordinating input from other voluntary and community sector agencies in this regard. It is further recommended that the Child Poverty Coalition be asked to monitor progress towards meeting pledge actions.

BEST PLACES

That the HCA continues to work closely with local authorities and housing partners, as part of its approach to the development of its 10-15 year investment strategies and three year plans that help to alleviate aspects of child poverty, e.g. around decent and zero carbon homes, thus ensuring that strategic decisions are taken with child and family poverty in mind.

That as a follow up to the current decent homes standard, councils should encourage a follow up to the programme that considers future investment in the existing housing stock (i.e. more than 90% of the current housing stock in the UK) to make them more 'liveable' and cheaper to run.

That discussions are held with the new Tenant Services Authority aimed at stabilising the housing market, especially in the private rented sector, to minimise the impact upheaval of families through loss of accommodation has on the future prospects (loss of social networks, school friends, disruption to education etc.) of the family and child. It is realised that the TSA will not take responsibility for the private rented sector immediately but early discussion on quality standards and joint working with other providers would be beneficial if property and management thresholds are to be improved.

That a basket of indicators covering the causes and effects of child poverty be used voluntarily by local authorities and partners in their reviews of their sustainable community strategy and LAA, as part of their approach to CAA and in response to forthcoming child poverty legislation.

Annex B

ANEC CHILD POVERTY TASK & FINISH GROUP MEMBERSHIP

The member-led Task and Finish group was set up following the Association's Annual Meeting in 2008. It was asked to consider a range of themes including child poverty and benefits, early years, health, housing, financial inclusion and performance to identify a range of recommendations to present to the Association's Annual Meeting in 2009. The recommendations are summarised in Annex A.

Association members were invited to participate, or nominate members from their own authority. Members from a variety of backgrounds, not just children's services, were encouraged to take part. The Regional Overview and Scrutiny Network nominated two members to join the group making a total of 16 (see below).

At the outset, members were keen to ensure the Task and Finish group was able to draw on the experience of other key stakeholders. As a result, the following representatives were secured:

- A head teacher drawn from Schools North East
- Children's primary care
- Government Office for the North East
- Improvement and Development Agency
- Director of Children's Services
- Improvement and Efficiency Partnership
- One North East
- Child Poverty Coalition

The Association would like to express its thanks to all those who participated in the work of the Task and Finish Group.

| Councils | Councillors |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Darlington Borough Council | Cllr Chris McEwan |
| Durham County Council | Cllr Lucy Hovvels |
| Gateshead Council | Cllr Malcolm Brain |
| Gateshead Council | Cllr Ian Mearns |
| Hartlepool Borough Council | Cllr Pamela Hargreaves (Chair) |
| Middlesbrough Council | Cllr Janice Brunton |
| Newcastle City Council | Cllr Diane Packham |
| Newcastle City Council | Cllr Jackie Slesenger |
| North Tyneside Council | Cllr Linda Arkley |
| North Tyneside Council | Cllr Muriel Green |
| North Tyneside Council | Cllr Amanda Normand |
| Northumberland County Council | Cllr Valerie Tyler |
| Northumberland County Council | Cllr Tom Wilson |
| Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council | Cllr Brenda Forster |
| Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council | Cllr Ian Jeffrey |
| Sunderland City Council | Cllr Pat Smith |

| Support & Advisory members | |
|---|------------------|
| Association of North East Councils | Rob Mitchell |
| Association of North East Councils | Keith Lamb |
| Child Poverty Coalition | Sue Stirling |
| Government Office for the North East | Jackie McHanwell |
| Improvement & Development Agency | David Alston |
| New Silksworth Infant School | Gillian Mitchell |
| Newcastle City Council | Catherine Fitt |
| North East Improvement & Efficiency Partnership | Julie Brown |
| North Tyneside Council | Andrew Kerr |
| One North East | Robin Beveridge |
| Stockton PCT/Council | Peter Seller |
| Sunderland City Council | Raj Singh |

Annex C

BASKET OF CHILD POVERTY INDICATORS

National Indicator Set: Summary of Child Poverty Indicators

This is a selection of indicators from the NIS which have an impact on many of the issues around Child Poverty. It is not comprehensive, but is intended to provide a basis for consideration.

They have been clustered into six major, but overlapping, groupings. The right-hand column lists the local authorities which currently incorporate the indicators as priority targets (i.e. it does not include local targets) in their Local Area Agreement (LAA). This data has been taken from the IDEa LAA tracker and includes any changes which may have resulted from the 2009 refresh process.

Benefits and Worklessness

| NI - Descriptor | LAs |
|---|---|
| NI116 – Proportion of children in poverty | Darlington, Gateshead, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Redcar & Cleveland, Sunderland |
| NI117 – 16 to 18 years olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) | Northumberland, North Tyneside, Newcastle, Gateshead, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Durham, Hartlepool, Stockton, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland |
| NI151 – Overall employment rate | Darlington, Hartlepool, Stockton, Durham |
| NI152 – Working age people on out of work benefits | Hartlepool, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Gateshead, Durham, Newcastle |
| NI153 – Working age people claiming out of work benefits in worst performing neighbourhoods | Redcar & Cleveland, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Darlington, Stockton, North Tyneside, Sunderland, Northumberland |
| NI173 – People falling out of work and on to incapacity benefits | Durham |
| NI180 – Changes in housing benefit/council tax benefit entitlements within the year | |
| NI181 – Time taken to process housing benefit/ council tax benefit new claims and change events | |

Housing and related issues

| NI - Descriptor | LAs |
|--|--|
| NI154 – Net additional homes provided. | Middlesbrough, Darlington, South Tyneside, North Tyneside, Sunderland, Newcastle, Gateshead, Durham |
| NI155 – Number of affordable homes delivered (gross) | Redcar & Cleveland, Hartlepool, Darlington, North Tyneside, Northumberland Newcastle Gateshead, Durham |
| NI156- Number of households in temporary accommodation | Durham, Redcar & Cleveland |
| NI158 - % decent council homes | Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Durham |
| NI187 – Tackling fuel poverty | Northumberland, Newcastle, Gateshead, Durham, Stockton |

Inequalities

| NI - Descriptor | LAs |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| NI54 – Services for disabled children | Redcar & Cleveland |
| NI106 – Young people from low income backgrounds progressing to higher education | Newcastle, North Tyneside, Sunderland |
| NI118 – Take up of formal childcare by low income working families | Northumberland |
| NI 81 Inequality gap in the achievement of a Level 3 qualification by the age of 19 | North Tyneside |
| NI 82 Inequality gap in the achievement of a Level 2 qualification by the age of 19 | |
| NI 102 Achievement gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers achieving the expected level at Key stages 2 and 4 PSA 11 | North Tyneside |

Learning and skills

| NI - Descriptor | LAs |
|--|---|
| NI 91 Participation of 17 year olds in education or training | Darlington |
| NI 146 Adults with learning disabilities in employment; | Middlesbrough |
| NI 150 Adults in contact with secondary mental health services in employment | Middlesbrough, Gateshead |
| NI 161 Learners achieving a Level 1 qualification in literacy | Hartlepool, Sunderland |
| NI 162 Learners achieving an Entry Level 3 qualification in numeracy | Hartlepool, Sunderland, Stockton |
| NI 163 Working age population qualified to at least Level 2 or higher | Hartlepool, Sunderland, Redcar & Cleveland, Gateshead, Middlesbrough, Northumberland, |
| NI 164 Working age population qualified to at least Level 3 or higher | Hartlepool, South Tyneside, Durham, Darlington |
| NI 165 Working age population qualified to at least Level 4 or higher | Gateshead |
| NI 174 Skill gaps in the current workforce reported by employers | |
| NI 45 Young offenders' engagement in suitable education, employment or training; | |
| NI 90 Take up of 14-19 learning diplomas | |

Educational attainment and achievement

| NI - Descriptor | LAs |
|--|---|
| NI 72 Achievement of at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage with at least 6 in each of the scales in Personal Social and Emotional Development and Communication, Language and Literacy PSA 10 | Statutory Indicator |
| NI 73 Achievement at level 4 or above in both English and Maths at Key Stage 2 (Threshold) PSA 10 | Statutory Indicator |
| NI 75 Achievement of 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent including English and Maths (Threshold) PSA 10 | Statutory Indicator |
| NI 76 Achievement at level 4 or above in both English and Maths at KS2 (Floor) | |
| NI 78 Achievement of 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE and equivalent including GCSEs in English and Maths (Floor) PSA 10 | |
| NI 88 Number of Extended Schools | |
| NI 92 Narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest PSA 11 | Statutory Indicator |
| NI 110 Young people's participation in positive activities PSA 14 | Durham, Gateshead, Hartlepool, North Tyneside, Northumberland, Redcar & Cleveland, Stockton |

Health and disabilities

| NI - Descriptor | LAs |
|--|---|
| NI 51 Effectiveness of child and adolescent mental health services | |
| NI 53 Prevalence of breast feeding at 6-8 weeks from birth | Newcastle, Northumberland, South Tyneside, Stockton |
| NI 54 Services for disabled children | Redcar & Cleveland |
| NI 55 Obesity among primary school children in reception year | Redcar & Cleveland |
| NI 56 Obesity among primary school age children in year 6 | Darlington, Durham, Gateshead, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Northumberland, South Tyneside, Stockton, Sunderland |
| NI 112 Under 18 conception rate PSA 14 | Redcar & Cleveland, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Darlington, Stockton, North Tyneside, Sunderland, Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle |
| NI 113 Presence of Chlamydia in under 25s | |
| NI 115 Substance misuse by young people | Middlesbrough, Northumberland, Redcar & Cleveland, South Tyneside |

