

## **Reducing Child Poverty: theme discussion**

### **Purpose of item:**

Share knowledge and understanding in an open ended way to lead to agreed ways forward for this new priority for the CYPP.

### **Recommendations:**

The Partnership Council:

1. considers how it engages with this agenda in both strategic and practical ways;
2. considers how it plays its part in conjunction with the Devon Strategic Partnership
3. agree ways forward with a report on progress in March.

### **Introduction**

Think Child, Think Family, Think Community as a guiding adage can hardly be truer than for reducing poverty. This is a key area for consideration in the context of the Devon Strategic Partnership.

Devon's developing partnerships through the Beacon scheme, most noticeably with Cornwall, will also support building on good practice.

### **Child Poverty Bill**

The Child Poverty Bill sets four poverty targets:

- relative low income,
- material deprivation,
- absolute poverty,
- persistent poverty

that the Secretary of State must meet by 2020. It will require the Secretary of State to produce and revise a child poverty strategy, seek the advice of an expert Child Poverty Commission and produce annual reports on the steps taken and progress made. The Child Poverty Bill is currently waiting to go to the report stage in the House of Commons and has yet to go to the House of Lords. Royal Assent can be expected in 2010.

The Bill will also place duties on local authorities and their partners. Following the consultation on the child poverty Bill the duty is framed as a requirement

for local partners to work together to tackle child poverty - not just local authorities. The Bill will introduce a requirement for:

- local authorities and partners (named on the face of the Bill) to work together to reduce, and mitigate the effects of, child poverty;
- the production of a needs assessment setting out the characteristics of which children and families are in poverty in the local area;
- local authorities and partners to prepare a joint child poverty strategy based on the needs assessment setting out the steps that each partner will take;
- local authorities to have regard to tackling child poverty in the production and revision of their Sustainable Communities Strategy.

It is the intention that these duties will be delivered through existing partnerships such as the Local Strategic Partnership rather than creating new partnerships. Alongside the Bill, the Government's child poverty unit is working with partners including the IDEA, LGA and C4EO to develop support for local authorities.

The Government is publishing a report from the independent Take Up Taskforce, providing examples of actions that can be taken now to tackle child poverty by maximising families' incomes. '*Take Up the Challenge*', outlines how local authorities and their partners can help poor families to take up their financial entitlements, illustrated by examples of local approaches that are having a real impact.

### **How it feels** – comments from children and young people

"...you just give up going to school..."

"...it's different when you're young –you don't notice it so much –you all share –I can see that with my brother, he's only 6 and goes to school nearly every day..."

"...as you get older you start to feel different...you stand out more...you get the 'mickey' taken out of you..."

"...when I was younger we all played together now there are people I used to spend time with when I was in primary school that just won't even talk to me now...it's a bit like they feel you can catch being poor..."

"...you get embarrassed to go in to school if you can't afford new clothes...old clothes don't look clean...I tried to wash my polo shirt in the sink but it's not the same..."

"...we don't have a washing machine so my mother washes our clothes in the bath...if the radiators are not working we can't dry them...you can't go to school then..."

"...You feel missed out...sometimes you are not even asked to do extra things in school because teachers know you can't afford it...I love playing hockey, I played for the school...but I can't play for the local team because my mother

can't afford a stick or the kit...my teacher encourages everyone to go but not me..."

"...I used to feel hungry in the morning going to school...people go to breakfast club...but if you don't have money you can't...you can't concentrate...when you are in little school it's free...then at lunch time you have to get a voucher or disc from the office...it is usually a bright colour so everyone can see..."

"...I get up in the morning sometimes and its cold...it's no good saying put a coat on, my brother wears it now..."

"...I live too close to school for a school bus so when the weather is really bad I still have to walk to school and back home, we don't have a car...my father is working though...my mother can't afford the bus fare...I stay home those days..."

"...we argue a lot in the house...my mother gets upset with my father...I know he spends money to get drugs...I don't mind really I'm older and can look after myself...but my brothers and sisters are younger...you teach us about our responsibility you should do it for parents to...teach them how to cook cheap but healthy meals they won't need so much money then...they could share it out more..."

### ***What we know:***

- The UK is the worlds 4<sup>th</sup> largest economy but has one of the highest levels of child poverty in Western Europe
- In 2007/08 there were 2.9m million children living in relative low income
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates that growing up in poverty costs Britain £25billion a year (including £17billion that could accrue to the Exchequer)
- $\frac{2}{3}$  of children from lone parents are poor compared with  $\frac{1}{4}$  of children with two parents
- Parents who have themselves been disadvantaged in childhood are more likely to have children who do poorly at school
- Poverty affects all ages.
- The outcomes for children are:
  - 15 times more likely to die in a fire at home
  - 5 times more likely to die in an accident
  - 10 times more likely to become a teenage mum
  - less likely to stay on in school
  - more likely to have higher levels of obesity
  - more likely to have fewer qualifications.
- Social class accounts for a large proportion in the gap in educational attainment between high and lower achievers –a gap evident as early as 22 months and which widens as children get older

- Nationally in 2007 35.5% of pupils eligible for free school meals obtained 5 or more A\* to C GCSEs compared with 62.9% of non-free school meals pupils
- In Devon in 2008 21.4% of pupils eligible for free school meals obtained 5+ A\*- C grades including English and mathematics compared to 51.5% of pupils who were not eligible for free school meals.

### **Quidz for Kids**

The programme is designed to increase take up of benefits by families who have a child or children with disabilities. This work is co-ordinated and carried out by Devon Welfare Rights Unit, part of Citizens Advice, and involves the provision of benefits awareness training to agencies across the county; partnership working with health and social care professionals and other agencies working with children and families; and a specialist welfare rights service to all those families and young people who meet the eligibility criteria: a child or young person under 22 with a disability or other special needs. It is a national leader and is being extended.

### **Key achievements to date:**

815 families in Devon with a child with disabilities or special needs awarded additional benefit income to an average of over £4,000 per family

total additional benefit income raised between 2005 & 2009 more than £3,800,000

Examples of feedback received:

*This has been an excellent project, invaluable for the many parent carers who, while desperate for financial assistance, seldom have the time or energy to tackle forms and formulas for themselves.”* Parent Carers’ Voice

*I feel that the project has filled an essential gap in ensuring that our children are not disadvantaged through lack of appropriate benefits.”*  
Southbrook Special School

### **Investment to Benefit Gain Ratio**

Between 2005 and 2008, additional benefit awards totalling over £2.6 million was secured for families with children with special needs in Devon. The total value of investment into the project was £168,500. This represents an annual return of over £15 for every £1 invested into funding the project. Given that the majority of benefits awarded are likely to remain in payment for at least 3 years, there is a return of £45 per £1 of original investment.