

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CHILD POVERTY REPORT OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

Executive Summary

This report presents the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review of the Child Poverty.

The overall aim of the review was to gain an insight and understand the specific issues relating to child poverty.

The Committee examined the following key lines of enquiry across a number of themed meetings:

- What are the issues around Child Poverty?
- What can we do locally to tackle Child Poverty issues?
- What is the extent of child poverty in Stockton and related levels of need and impact?
- How well current policies, services and interventions address the extent of child poverty in Stockton including any potential gaps?
- What changes should be made to policies, services and interventions based on best practice, national recommendations, evidence base and data?
- How does Child Poverty differ across the borough and what are the reasons for this?
- Is there a different impact on child poverty between private and rented households?
- What are the issues for households with a disabled child and is there enough support in place?
- What more can be done to provide support in early years, in particular to new mothers/families?
- What strategic approaches are in place to tackle Child Poverty at present?
- What local approaches are in place to reduce Child Poverty e.g., Foodbanks?
- How can the Council, together with its partners, collectively respond tackle Child Poverty?
- To gain an insight and understand the specific issues relating to Child Poverty

The Committee has taken evidence from North East Child Poverty Commission, Council Officers, SDAIS, Catalyst, TEWV, 0-19 Service Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust, Thrive, Barriers to learning, Poverty Proofing the School Day, Children North East, The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health/ Child Poverty Action Group and Joseph Rountree Foundation.

Key Findings

National Picture (2019/20)

- In 2019/20 there were 4.3million children living in poverty in the UK; 31% of all children
- Poverty affects:
 - 47% of children living in households with three or more children
 - 46% of children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic families
 - 49% of lone parent families.
 - 34% of children in families with youngest child aged under 5
 - 37% of children in families where someone has a disability
- 75% of children in poverty are from working households

Local Picture (2019/20)

- In the North East 37% of children were living in poverty, the second highest rate in the UK, behind London at 38% and the North East experienced the biggest increase in child poverty of anywhere in the UK in the five years leading to the pandemic
- The steep North East increase is likely to be influenced by the large proportion of low-paid workers pushed below the poverty line by a reduction in the value of working age benefits
- JRF contend that it may be harder to progress out of poverty in the North East due to higher unemployment rates and lower average earnings
- Trussell Trust emergency food parcels to children in the North East rose by 26% between 2019/20 and 2020/21 (to 46,084)
- In Stockton there has been a 71% increase in households in receipt of Universal Credit and a 24.4% increase in Stockton for pupils eligible for Free School Meals
- The threshold for free school meals is low; extending this to all families in receipt of universal credit would benefit a further 2,900 Stockton children and help families to access other forms of support
- In 2019/20 there were 13,922 children living in poverty in Stockton which was an increase of almost 4,300 since 2014/15
- Child poverty is not an unsolvable problem; it is highly policy responsive. The North East saw the biggest fall in child poverty of any UK region or nation between 1999 and 2013

Impact of Poverty

- Child poverty is associated with a wide range of health damaging impacts, negative educational outcomes, and adverse long-term social and psychological outcomes (all of which impacts life chances across the life course)
- Poor health which is associated with child poverty limits children's potential and development, leading to poor health and life chances in adulthood
- Children living in deprivation and poverty experience avoidable differences in health outcomes compared to their more affluent peers

Financial Inclusion

- In 2020/21, 29% of enquiries into SDAIS were from clients with dependent children. The main reason for households with dependent children seeking advice was welfare benefits; the main reason for lone parent families seeking advice was debt
- Demand on food banks has increased steadily over the past three years
- Future pressures were anticipated relating to benefit changes, welfare problems and mental health, increasing energy prices, employment, and housing security
- The Infinity Partnership were co-ordinating activities promoting access to advice, targeting work through the Community Partnerships, maximising family income and maintaining face to face advice services

A Fairer Stockton on Tees - A Framework for Tackling Inequalities

- The Council are leading the development of a new approach to tackling inequality in the Borough to ensure that targeted support and help is delivered to those living in poverty and improve their outcomes. This Framework has five key areas of focus:
 - I. Tackling fundamental issues across the Borough as a whole
 - II. A focus on reducing the inequalities faced by identified disadvantaged communities
 - III. A focus on deprived neighbourhoods
 - IV. A focus on the most marginalised
 - V. An emphasis on the Council as a major employer, commissioner, and purchaser

Food Poverty

- The Stockton-On-Tees Food Power Network was established in Partnership with Catalyst in January 2020. The programme aims to strengthen the ability of local communities to reduce food poverty, through solutions developed in partnership and with the support of peers from across the UK. Membership of the Food Power Network provides access to funding opportunities and practical support and resources. The SFPN has established a wide and active membership, developed the 2021 Food Poverty Reduction Strategy, and secured £20,000 from UNICEF/Soccer Aid and £2,500 from Sustain. Stockton Council have also provided funding of £60,000 to provide practical support
- Public Health invested £200,000 in Summer Holiday Enrichment Programmes (HEP). Each year this has reached approximately 1,500 children in low-income families
- The Government announced in their October spending review that there would be a further three years of Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) funding and work was underway to ensure that the very best programme was offered to many more children and their families. Over 6,500 thousand FSM children had not accessed the programmes but there had been spare places. Closer working with schools was also planned to encourage take up. Although HEP was for low-income families, HAF was solely for FSM children and there was only a 15% leeway in applying this
- The programmes were very prescriptive and more flexibility to offer remote provision would be welcomed. £909,850 had been allocated locally, split as £91,500 (20/21) and £818,350 (21/22)

Children's Mental Health

- There had been a significant increase in demand for services and waiting times which was having a detrimental impact on young people and also on their families
- Staffing and funding pressures were driving alternative approaches to delivery including a move away from the usual diagnostic led approach to a whole system approach with a greater emphasis on multi-agency co-ordination and collaboration between agencies and partners
- Co-ordinated work was taking place in schools with positive early feedback. A focus on early help and intervention would help to free up specialist services
- Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) were a new government initiative to help increase access to mental health support for children and young people. MHSTs were currently being rolled out in Billingham Schools and there was a target that by the end of 2024, 40-50% of children would be attending a school with a MHST
- Better co-ordination of care with Primary Care Networks (PCNs) was also taking place with CAMHS practitioners being based in GP practices. A PCN had been selected in Ingleby Barwick as a pilot and if successful further business cases would follow

Health and Wellbeing

- The 0-19 Service were becoming increasingly aware of the impacts of poverty on families. The Service were seeking to address the inequalities through the following actions and approaches:
 - Holistic health needs assessment
 - Robust Vulnerability Questionnaires
 - Communication with Midwives
 - Promote Healthy Start Vouchers
 - Awareness of Community Assets
 - Working in an integrated One Team with Family Action and Family Hubs so families tell story once
 - Undertake New-born behavioural observation to promote bonding and attachment
 - Perinatal and Postnatal mental health screening and support
 - STEPS Pathways (Enhanced offer over and above mandated contacts)
 - Promote uptake of nursery placements
 - Integrated 2- and 3-year development reviews

- Parenting Therapist roles and Incredible Years Programme
- Universal offer at key school transition points and targeted one to one work with those who need it
- Emotional resilience nurses and Psychological Well Being Practitioner roles
- Transport costs were becoming a huge issue and preventing families from, for example, keeping health appointments which reinforced the need for basing services and support in accessible locations
- It was important to explore the reasons for the problems being experienced by families rather than making assumptions or judging and recognising and taking account of lived experience
- Having a universal offer played a vital role in prevention

Barriers to Learning

- Challenges/ barriers identified in Pupil Premium Strategy Statements were as follows:
 - Poor home conditions
 - Eviction
 - Poor diet/ hunger
 - Inadequate clothing
 - Lack of equipment
 - Homes with few/ no books to stimulate an interesting in reading
 - Access to IT
 - Computer/ tablet
 - Data
 - Parent/ carer IT skills to support
- The Education Improvement Service was seeking to address the inequalities through the following actions and approaches:
 - Strengthened partnership with Catalyst and the Infinity Partnership
 - Health Schools Programme
 - DWP Vouchers
 - Promotion of affordable uniform
 - Empowering staff to promote FSM take up to vulnerable families
 - Sharing research and evidenced based action via training
- DfE computers / tablets were distributed in collaboration with ONE IT and senior leaders were empowered to challenge allocations if needed; additional resource was also secured from the Middlesbrough and Teesside Philanthropic Foundation. Around 800 devices were initially distributed to schools with additional devices distributed for siblings
- Schools and other settings had been able to apply for DfE Internet Access Support Grant in January 2022 to cover costs incurred between 1 September to 31 December 2021
- Poverty Proofing the School Day is an audit which gathers the voice of every child in school in order to understand their experience of school and explore solutions unique to the setting. It is an inclusive, supportive, non-judgemental process that results in a written report and action plan. Training for governors and teachers is provided on poverty and its impact on education and also a follow-up review and potential accreditation
- Through the Digital Inclusion Co-ordinator, Catalyst was running an initiative converting donated laptops; a Tees wide scheme would be worthy of investigation
- The UK Government has set out a framework of what is considered the essential digital skills needed to living and working in today's world. This has become even more important post Covid 19. A number of video tutorials are also available on the Catalyst website that address the various components of essential digital skills; these video tutorials would benefit from wider publicity and use for example through family hubs

Fuel Poverty

- The impacts of fuel poverty on children included:
 - Weight Gain
 - Increased risk of asthma and respiratory diseases
 - Increased hospital admissions
 - Poor grades at school
 - Mental ill health though environmental effects (such as sleeping badly because of a cold home or having to share a bed with siblings)
- JRF is warning that without additional support, people already in poverty are likely to find a sharp increase in energy bills very difficult to cope with. With the impact of rising energy bills expected to be much harsher for families on low incomes, they argue that there is a clear case for targeted protections to prevent serious hardship once the energy price cap is lifted

Conclusion

In the North East, 37% of children are living in poverty, the second highest rate in the UK. This is likely to be influenced by higher unemployment rates, the large proportion of low paid workers in the region and a reduction in the value of working age benefits. Sadly, this position is likely to worsen with future pressures arising from welfare changes, increases in the cost of living, including rising energy prices and lack of employment security.

The impact of poverty on children is profound. Children living in deprivation experience a wide range of health damaging impacts, negative educational outcomes, long term social and psychological outcomes, and poor life chances in adulthood compared to their more affluent peers. These differences are avoidable.

Our recommendations seek to better understand the issues by working with those families who are experiencing poverty, to enhance the support and interventions that are in place and each year to focus on a key priority for targeted action.

Recommendations

1. That a family poverty profile is compiled and updated annually from available data and input from those with lived experience and is used to identify a key priority for targeted action each year; an initial focus being take up of Free School Meals for those eligible and in need.
2. That support offered to families in poverty is enhanced through:
 - a. A more integrated and visible offer for families experiencing poverty focusing on information, advice, financial and other support
 - b. Roll out of Poverty Proofing the School Day across all Stockton Schools
 - c. Establishing a mutual aid/ giving scheme, in partnership with Catalyst, to facilitate community giving
 - d. Ensuring an enhanced support offer is available for communities and areas targeted through the Fairer Stockton-on-Tees Framework
3. That specific interventions are put in place focusing on:
 - a. Healthy Food through the delivery of cooking and budgeting skills in schools, linked to Healthy Schools
 - b. Help with energy costs through warm energy schemes/ credits etc.
 - c. Digital inclusion for all children including schemes to re-use redundant laptops and roll out of skills training and family learning
4. That, subject to funding, a direct payments scheme is developed for those identified as in need, building on the examples of vouchers during the pandemic.
5. That all subsidy policies are reviewed and revised as appropriate to provide streamlined and enhanced support for families.