

# **CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY 18 MAY 2011**

## **Introduction**

1. In April the government published the national Child Poverty Strategy (A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families' lives: April 2011). The Child Poverty Needs Assessment that is currently under development is the first step towards a local Child Poverty Strategy for Oxfordshire.

2. The aim of this paper is to give members of the committee the opportunity to discuss and influence the development of a local Child Poverty Strategy. This will be supported by a more detailed presentation of the information at the meeting.

## **Background**

3. Growing up in poverty has a significant impact on children and young people both during their childhood and beyond. Research shows that children who grow up in poverty have a greater risk of having poor health, low educational attainment and failing to reach their full potential. Currently 22% of children in the UK are living in poverty. This equates to 2.8 million children (NI116, 2008). The Government has renewed its commitment to ending child poverty by 2020 and the Child Poverty Act 2010 requires action to be taken both at a national and local level.

4. It is clear that the coalition government's approach to child poverty is much broader than the traditional approach of moving families above an arbitrary income level. The ambition is to create the environment, incentives and skills for people to be able to create a better life for their families. This is supported through the new Localism Bill (December 2010) and the drive towards "Community Budgets" that will be rolled out nationally by 2014/14. Additionally the direction of travel outlined in the Public Health White Paper (Our Strategy for Public Health in England, November 2010) and the new NHS White Paper (Liberating the NHS, December 2010) reinforce the message that abolishing child poverty is a cross-departmental priority for government.

5. Last year the government published Frank Field's report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances (The Foundation Years: Preventing poor children

becoming poor adults. December 2010). The recommendations from this report, together with the report from Graham Allen on the cost effectiveness of and evidence base for early intervention programmes, now form the basis of a government consultation on tackling Child Poverty (Tackling Child Poverty and Improving Life Chances: Consulting on a new approach).

### **The Child Poverty Needs Assessment**

6. The Child Poverty Needs Assessment is an opportunity to highlight what child poverty looks like in Oxfordshire, to identify who is in poverty, where they live, why they are in poverty, examples of local good practice in relation to child poverty and evidence about what more can be done to lift people out of poverty.

7. Tackling child poverty will help to improve children's lives today and it will also enhance their life chances in the longer term, enabling them to make the most of their talents, achieve their full potential in life and pass on the benefits to their children. It is an issue that is already at the heart of the local Children's and Young People's Plan (CYPP), THE Oxfordshire 20:30 Strategy and Oxfordshire County Council's Corporate Plan. Narrowing the gap for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and breaking the cycle of deprivation remain key priorities for the Council and NHS alike.

8. The Child Poverty Act 2010 requires local authorities to co-ordinate a needs assessment and to develop a joint strategy with partners to tackle child poverty in their area. Partnership involvement is essential as the causes and consequences of child poverty cut across many different sectors.

## Process

9. The Oxfordshire Children and Young People's Trust is responsible for overseeing the needs assessment and developing the strategy by the end of 2011. A small group of data experts has gathered together key data and information, using the suggested framework of the four building blocks from the IDeA's national toolkit as outlined below:

<b>Employment and Life Skills</b>	<b>Family and Life Chances</b>
<b>Financial Support</b>	<b>Place and Delivery</b>
<b>At risk groups</b>	

10. The child poverty needs assessment is not just about gathering facts and figures but is an opportunity to draw on the knowledge and experience of local practitioners and children, young people and their families. To achieve this there were four consultation workshops in March and April 2011 which attracted a wide range of people and organisations. This included three workshops held in the North, City and South of the County bringing together more than 100 frontline professionals. Their input is integrated throughout this report.

11. In April, 40 children and their parents and carers came together at an inter-generational workshop to discuss child poverty. Additionally Oxfordshire Young Enablers (OYE!) ran a satellite workshop session with young disabled people. A summary of their discussions about what keeps people living in poverty and what can be done to lift people out of poverty will be available in the final report. This very early engagement with partners, frontline workers and people who live in Oxfordshire has enabled a more complete and in depth picture of child poverty as well as getting 'buy in' and engagement for the future implementation of the strategy.

## Emerging Key Findings

- In Oxfordshire there are 15,660 children in poverty, or 11.7% of all children in the area. This is about half the national average and puts us in the lowest 25% of local authorities in England.
- However, within the county there are wide variations. 23.2% of children in Oxford City are living in poverty compared to 7.4% in West Oxfordshire. Ten wards in Oxford City, one in Banbury and one in Abingdon are within the top 25% most disadvantaged nationally.
- Oxfordshire is the most rural county in the South East. Child poverty does not tend to show up in rural data as numbers are small. However, when all the small numbers are added together, the rural share (of children in poverty) is 23% or 3,345 children.
- The experience of growing up in poverty in a rural area may be worse than in an urban area due to poor access to services that can help
- Some children are more at risk of being in poverty than others. Of the 15,660 children in poverty in Oxfordshire, 73% are in lone parent families.
- Employment is a key route out of poverty. In Oxfordshire the economy has remained relatively strong in spite of the recession and there are jobs with prospects for those with the right skills and qualifications (although the impact of public sector job losses has yet to be felt)
- However, in a competitive job market with high numbers of people with degrees, parents and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds or areas face major barriers including low self confidence and low aspirations, lack of basic skills, qualifications and experience, difficulty finding and affording childcare and problems with transport
- Benefit dependency may then become the norm and children growing up in these families are in danger of repeating the vicious circle which keeps them in poverty

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- Education is the key to gaining a job with prospects. Oxford is a world renowned centre of learning and place of academic excellence. However, the picture is very different for those groups of young people growing up in poverty. In 2010 only 22% of those growing up in poverty (defined as eligible for Free School Meals) achieve 5 or more GCSEs A\*-C including English and Maths.
- Where you live in the county and what your family background is also determines how healthy you are. For example, smoking in pregnancy, which is linked to low birth weight (an indicator of future health problems) is over three times more likely amongst teenage mothers than mothers aged over 20. Poor health is a barrier to employment and may also affect parenting capacity
- Having a stable, good quality home to live in is a basic necessity and prerequisite to enable children to learn, thrive and achieve. In Oxfordshire there is a shortage of affordable housing. At worst this can result in homelessness – there are currently over 200 children living in temporary accommodation in Oxford City.

### **Next steps**

12. In summary, what has been found in the child poverty needs assessment is that children growing up in Oxfordshire face very different outcomes according to who they are (family background) and where they live. The full needs assessment will be presented to the Children and Young People's Trust Board on 20<sup>th</sup> May.