

CHILD POVERTY

Child poverty consultation feedback on the needs assessment

Appendix I



I. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On the 15th October 2012 a child poverty strategy kick start event was held with key stakeholders in the city. Approximately 60 delegates attended the event from a cross section of the public, private and voluntary and community sectors. This included representation from health, the Police, Head Teachers, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Jobcentre Plus, Careers South West and the Council.
- 1.2 The purpose of this event was to:
 - agree the key findings and recommendations from the draft needs assessment as the basis on which to develop Plymouth's child poverty strategy and;
 - agree the broad strategic outcomes for tackling child poverty across the city.
- 1.3 At the event delegates received a short presentation on the key messages from the needs assessment and the implications of the findings for Plymouth. This was presented around three themes; Financial Support and Independence, Family and Children's Life Chances and Communities and Neighbourhoods. These themes seek to combine two key frameworks that set out an overarching approach for the development of local strategies to address child poverty. These include the 'Building Blocks Framework developed by the Child Poverty Unit, alongside the framework outlined within the National Child Poverty Strategy 'A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families' Lives'.
- 1.4 A series of facilitated group sessions were held to ask stakeholders if they felt that the key messages and implications accurately reflected the profile of child poverty in Plymouth and if there were any areas which required more evidence or that were missing. This feedback has now been collated and the needs assessment revised to reflect the comments from this event.

2. FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND INDEPENDENCE

- 2.1 Discussions focused on the Growth agenda for the city set in the context of the national and local economy including the level and distribution of worklessness and welfare dependency. Attendees were also asked to consider the impact on those in employment but who may also be living in poverty and examine some of the main barriers to employment and financial independence such as child care provision, transport and financial management. The impact of the significant welfare reforms was also discussed.
- 2.2 Overall there was a general consensus that the data in the needs assessment was correct and reflected what practitioners know to be true about Plymouth; however the following areas needed additional clarification.

Childcare

- 2.3 Childcare was an area which stakeholders felt needed greater clarity. Their main concerns were around the cost and lack of availability of good quality childcare which can make it a barrier to employment opportunities for parents with worries that the changes to tax credits will make childcare even more unaffordable.
- 2.4 The needs assessment has now reviewed information from the Plymouth City Council Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2011 and reports that although child care places were generally seen as sufficient there is considered to be a lack of places in Barne Barton. Parents also report that local childcare can be too expensive for those on a low income and that the lump sums required at the start can also be prohibitive. Lack of flexibility is also of concern.
- 2.5 The future pressures on existing childcare places with the expansion of free entitlement for disadvantaged 2 year olds and the further extension of free entitlement in 2014 (to 40% of disadvantaged 2 year olds) is now acknowledged. The need to secure sufficient childcare places for disadvantaged two year olds will also become part of the Local Authority's statutory duties from September 2013. It has been identified that there will be a predicted shortfall of approximately 350 places in 2013 and a further 1,350 from 2014 when the offer is extended to 40% of all eligible two year olds.

Transport and accessibility

- 2.6 Limited accessibility to public transport routes for families in the most deprived areas was also an area that stakeholders felt required greater clarity. The cost of transport from deprived areas to connect people to areas of employment was highlighted as a major barrier.
- 2.7 The needs assessment has now reviewed data from the Plymouth Local Transport Plan 2011-2026 (LTP) which recognises some of the key barriers to access such as not being able to afford to buy and run a vehicle and that car ownership is lower in neighbourhoods of poorer health and higher levels of unemployment.
- 2.8 The findings from the LTP tell us that during the daytime few people in deprived areas will find themselves more than 400 meters walk from a bus stop with a frequent service and certainly no more than 800 metres walk. However, there are lower levels of accessibility to key employment areas such as Belliver, Estover and Langage. Those residents living in the most deprived areas will find it takes more than 30 minutes with their journey often requiring a change of bus to reach these areas. Those employed in shift work with early morning starts or late night finishes are more disadvantaged as bus services are fewer and further between at these times.

In work / low income families

- 2.9 There was much discussion at the event around in-work child poverty combined with the rising cost of living (e.g. cost of utilities). The needs assessment contains details of the prevalence of low income working families in Plymouth and reflects on evidence of take up from the Food Bank and debt advice providers. The Fuel Poverty section now acknowledges the difference in tariffs from utilities providers and that using the 'pay as you go' method as opposed to direct debit schemes means that those on lower incomes often end up paying more for their energy.

- 2.10 The combination of all these factors means that anecdotally there is a growing number of in- work families on low incomes that are more vulnerable to poverty and its consequences as outlined in the needs assessment such as debt, alcohol misuse, and mental health problems among others.

Employability and literacy and numeracy skills

- 2.11 Feedback from stakeholders indicates that a clear distinction needs to be made between employability skills and literacy and numeracy skills. This has now been reflected in the needs assessment. Other feedback suggested that while aspiring to attract high quality jobs there also needs to be lower skilled employment opportunities as a stepping stone to future high quality employment.

Lone parent families

- 2.12 The event also highlighted a gap in our knowledge relating to children living in lone parent families. Unfortunately the measure used to understand relative low income poverty does not allow us to identify the make-up of lone parent families. For example we do not know whether the lone parent is the father or mother or the number of children affected in an individual family. Lone parent data is captured as part of the National Census of Undertaking. This will be available in February 2013; the only available data at present is from the 2001 census.

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

- 2.13 Measuring the number of young people classed as NEET can be a good measure for both levels of youth unemployment and of post 16 education attendance. However feedback from the event suggested that it should be noted that children that fall into the NEET category may be subject to multiple needs not just solely educational attainment. This is now reflected in the needs assessment.

3. FAMILY LIFE AND CHILDREN'S LIFE CHANCES

- 3.1 This theme reviewed the wide range of factors such as family, home environment, health and education which contribute to improving the life chances of poorer children and young people. There was broad agreement that the needs assessment reported on the key factors that determine a child's life chances; however the following areas needed additional clarification.

Families with multiple and complex needs

- 3.2 Families with multiple and complex needs live in the most deprived areas of the city was identified as a key message from the needs assessment. Attendees at the event however cautioned that while there is a greater concentration in these areas there are also pockets across other parts of the city. This has been reflected in the needs assessment.

Educational attainment

- 3.3 The use of free school meal take up was challenged as perhaps too crude a marker to solely measure the gap in inequality of attainment between those eligible and those not eligible for free school meals. However, while this is acknowledged, the use of the free

school meal measure is the only real way to identify inequality gaps in attainment based on income and is nationally recognised as the proxy for poverty.

- 3.4 Attendees also identified that levels of income are not a sole contributor to poorer educational attainment. Other determinants such as parental support and aspiration were raised as contributing to lower levels of attainment. This is now anecdotally reflected in the needs assessment focusing on parents' influences and the child's own attitudes and behaviours.

Health inequalities

- 3.5 The key message relating to inequalities in life expectancy has been reworded following feedback from the event. Concerns were raised that the statement was too specific in that it assumed 'a child' as each and every, where in fact there are other determinants that affect the statement. The needs assessment now also acknowledges the improvements made in recent years in health outcomes for families in the most deprived areas but reflects that these are still likely to be less positive in these areas with lower rates of breastfeeding (at birth), higher rates of teenage pregnancy, and higher rates of low birth weights.
- 3.6 Data in the needs assessment shows the gap in obesity rates in reception year between the most and least deprived neighbourhoods has increased in recent years although the trend for year 6 is less clear. Feedback from the event highlighted a gap in our understanding of the reasons behind this inequality gap. Stakeholders provided anecdotal evidence that has been included. A caveat has also been added that there is concern that some parents may refuse permission to have their child weighed which can affect the results.
- 3.7 The adult mental health data in the needs assessment has now been strengthened using data from the Plymouth Adult Mental Health needs assessment published by Public Health in March 2012. It identifies a number of risk factors associated with mental health in Plymouth and highlights some of the key findings that are relevant to child poverty.

4. COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

- 4.1 This discussion focused on the key issues that link poverty and its direct affects within local communities and neighbourhoods. A key driver of living in poverty revolves around quality of housing as well as crime and community safety issues including anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse. There was broad agreement on the content of the needs assessment; however the following areas needed additional clarification.

Housing

- 4.2 Stakeholders felt that the key message relating to social housing misrepresented the quality of social housing across the city, which could be interpreted that social housing in the east of the city is of a lower standard than that of the west. This key message has been amended to clarify the original meaning.
- 4.3 A breakdown of the private sector housing data in the needs assessment was requested by rental and ownership. This is currently unavailable. However, the quality of private sector housing as a whole is of concern in the city and this is therefore reflected in the implications.

Domestic abuse

- 4.4 It was also highlighted that there are specific crime types for example domestic and sexual abuse within the home that may have a more significant impact on family relationships and children. While this does not specifically change the findings in the needs assessment, continued work with the Plymouth Domestic Abuse Partnership will take place to ensure that child poverty outcomes remain a key theme in tackling domestic abuse.