

**Draft Scrutiny Inquiry Final report
Combating child poverty and
raising aspirations
20th June 2012**

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Introduction and Scope

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) decided to undertake an inquiry around the themes of raising aspiration and combating child poverty.
2. In order to scope the inquiry a small working group of Board members met with key officers to consider the potential terms of reference. They considered the work of the corporate Child Poverty Strategic Outcome Group and also the background to the Child Poverty Needs Analysis arising from the Child Poverty Act 2010.
3. The following key points arose from the working group's discussion:
 - There are some systemic issues (eg regulations, protocols, existing working practices) which present barriers to practical solutions, and can stop support to families being as effective as it could be. Examples ranged from housing lettings policies to the size of school dining rooms.
 - It was suggested that the inquiry look at some case studies of clusters and/or Super Output Areas (SOAs) to get a detailed picture of how effective services are on the ground for families in areas of deprivation.
 - This approach could include case studies of families, but also talking to the relevant service providers about the common barriers, as well as good practice.
 - There are also local examples of work aimed at raising aspirations and breaking the cycle of poverty, which could be explored in the same way. The importance of empowering people was stressed.

- A particular issue was raised about transition, and the different levels of support available to children and families at different stages of their life.

4. The working group reported its discussions to the full Scrutiny Board. The Board agreed that the terms of reference for the inquiry should be based on the above issues.

Scope of the Inquiry

5. The purpose of the inquiry was to make an assessment and, where appropriate, make recommendations in relation to good practice in, and barriers to
 - The delivery of effective joined-up services and solutions for children and families in poverty
 - Initiatives aimed at raising aspirations and breaking the cycle of poverty
6. The Board conducted its inquiry over two main sessions. The first session provided members with the national and local context in relation to work on combating child poverty and raising aspirations, as well as sharing the current work on the child poverty needs assessment and draft child poverty strategy for Leeds.
7. For the second session the Board split into two groups, who each visited one of the clusters identified for detailed study. During the session, members heard from local workers, visited facilities in smaller groups and met some service users. Each session began and ended with a round table discussion.
8. We were particularly pleased at the range of people from both other partner



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organisations and departments of the council other than Children's Services who engaged with us during this piece of work. It demonstrates the importance to everyone of tackling these issues successfully in Leeds. We would like to thank everyone who took part in our inquiry for their time and insights.

9. One of the key anticipated impacts from this inquiry is on the way that Scrutiny Boards conduct their inquiries. The Board found that splitting up and conducting the majority of the inquiry in one day on site in localities was a very productive way of carrying out our work.
10. It meant that all members of the Board were included in the fieldwork and had the opportunity to meet with front-line staff and service users.

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National Context

11. The Child Poverty Act 2010 required local authorities and their partners to cooperate to reduce, and mitigate the effects of, child poverty in their local areas. This includes carrying out a child poverty needs assessment and developing and delivering a child poverty strategy.
12. Reducing the number of children in child poverty was a strategic outcome in the Leeds Strategic Plan and is a cross-cutting theme of the Children and Young People's Plan 2011-15. In 2008 (the latest year for which figures were available when we carried out our inquiry) 22.5% or 33,695 children in Leeds were living in poverty.
13. We know that poverty is the root of most poor outcomes for children and blights the life of too many children in Leeds. Poverty lies behind the common factors for poor outcomes and must continue to be addressed if we are to narrow the gap between the most and least advantaged children, young people and families in the city.
14. Against that backdrop we looked first at the national and local context to reducing poverty and also mitigating against the impact of poverty on children and families, before taking a more in-depth look at the activity taking place in two specific areas of the city – South Seacroft and Beeston and Holbeck.
15. The Child Poverty Act identified four building blocks in relation to the preparation of Child Poverty Strategies:
 - Education, health and family
 - Employment and adult skills
 - Housing and neighbourhoods
 - Financial support for families
16. The approach in Leeds is building on each of these blocks, with lead officers identified for each block. We received a summary against each of the blocks of the picture in Leeds, including evidence based best practice and emerging priorities.
17. We also learned about the child poverty 'basket of indicators' which reflects families' current situation but also the direct and indirect influences on their longer-term ability to move into sustained well paid employment. The basket of indicators is split into 4 groups:
 - Tier 1: the proportion of children in poverty
 - Tier 2: factors that directly influence families' resources and incomes today – parental employment and earnings; financial support and living costs
 - Tier 3: factors that directly influence families' ability to enter and sustain well paid employment in the short and longer term – education, adult skills, childcare, transport and job availability
 - Tier 4: factors that indirectly influence families' ability to enter and sustain well paid employment and escape poverty now and in the future – children's outcomes, financial inclusion, access to services and facilities, health, teenage pregnancy, relationship breakdown, crime, drug and alcohol use.
18. We were told about the independent review on child poverty and life chances led by Frank Field, which published its report in December 2010 "The Foundation Years: preventing poor



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children becoming poor adults". The report concluded that life chances are most heavily influenced by experiences in the first five years of life and placed strong emphasis on investment in integrated provision for families with young children.

19. We were aware that the economic situation and proposed changes in the benefits system would also present additional challenges to achieving our objectives in the short term.

Local Context

20. Against this national background, we received a presentation on the key issues for Leeds and considered the draft Child Poverty Needs Assessment.

21. The presentation highlighted the major local issues under each of the four building blocks and identified emerging priorities.

22. Education, Health and family

Five of the seven factors common to most poor outcomes for children are directly related to poverty:

- No parent in the family in work
- Family living in poor or overcrowded housing
- No parent with qualifications
- Family has low income
- Family cannot afford a number of food and clothing items

23. To reduce inequalities and ensure more children grow up in safe and supportive families, the emerging priorities for this block were identified as:

- Narrowing the achievement gap at Foundation stage, Key Stage 2, Key Stage 4 and Level 2
- Embedding 'every child a talker' in all areas of disadvantage
- Raising the levels of aspiration and attendance at school through targeted programmes where risk is greatest
- Reducing the number of young people from at risk groups who are not participating in education or training or are not in employment from 16-19
- Increasing parental involvement and engagement in their child's learning and development, in particular from pre birth to 4 and 11-13, through targeted, evidence based programmes in disadvantaged localities
- Reducing health inequalities by ensuring that all economically disadvantaged mothers experience an integrated assessment of needs and service delivery from the start of their pregnancy
- Continuing to drive down the rates of teenage conception in the city
- Developing integrated wellbeing capacity to improve and target support to vulnerable families and reduce the need for high statutory interventions in the lives of children and young people

24. Employment and adult skills

To ensure that workless and low income households, including lone parents have easy access to learning, skills and job opportunities the following priorities were identified:



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- Complementing Work Programme interventions with targeted, wrap around support within neighbourhoods for those facing the most complex barriers to work
- Connecting adults from the most deprived neighbourhoods to opportunities generated by the city's key regeneration projects
- Implementing the Employment Leeds model for employer engagement to maximise inclusive recruitment practices for target groups, clear routeways back into work and opportunities for in work training for sustainability
- Increasing availability and access to sustainable childcare in areas of deprivation

25. Housing and Neighbourhoods

To ensure that the local community and housing provision enable children in poverty to thrive the following actions were seen as key:

- Delivering flexible, quality housing services for 'Team Leeds'
- Shifting the focus from property to people centric decision making
- Embedding the preventative culture in the housing strategy
- Ensuring that housing options and other housing related services can be resolved and delivered through wider services such as the Contact Centre, One Stop Services and Children's Services
- Embedding a 'no wrong door' culture into access to all housing and neighbourhood based services

- Increasing family support services to vulnerable families and those at risk of poor outcomes
- Ensuring that reducing child poverty becomes integral to strategic, team and individual workforce development programmes

26. Financial support for families

To ensure that financial support is responsive to families that are economically disadvantaged or in need the following key actions were considered necessary:

- Promoting and supporting actions and objectives as set out in the Advice Leeds Strategy 2010 to 2013
- Continuing the free independent advice service provision available in Children's Centres across the city and extending it in clusters of schools
- Continuing to support Leeds City Credit Union's neighbourhood branch network
- Developing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of benefit changes to low income families
- Fuel poverty – action required to ensure maximum benefit is provided to those families most at risk
- Free school meals – action required to improve uptake of free school meals

27. In particular we also noted the challenge presented by the rising birth rate and the demographic patterns across the city.

28. This information was the basis on which the city's Child Poverty Strategy has



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been developed and is now being implemented.

29. We consider that Child Poverty is a significant issue which warrants a continued overview by Scrutiny and therefore suggest that the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) continues to receive information for consideration.

Recommendation 1 – That the Director of Children’s Services provides us with an initial update on progress with the Child Poverty Strategy when he brings the formal response to our recommendations in July 2012.

Fieldwork

30. Having ‘set the scene’, the Board completed its inquiry by visiting two case study areas of Leeds, where we had the opportunity to visit local facilities and discuss with local front-line staff some of the practicalities of addressing child poverty and seeking to raise children and young people’s aspirations.

31. In each case we were provided with a detailed area profile, which starts to break down the city-wide picture to a local level.

32. The profile included the following information:

Demographic data

- Age profile of population
- Changes in population 2001-9
- Black and minority ethnic population
- Household/family structure
- Faith communities
- Looked After Children

- Levels of deprivation across the 17 Lower Super Output areas (LSOAs)
- Proportion of children in poverty by LSOA

Education

- Free school meal entitlement
- Special Educational Needs
- Black and minority ethnic population
- Achievement at Foundation Stage, KS2 and 4
- Attendance

Other

- NEET and not known 16-19 data
- Workless adults
- Job Seekers Allowance claimants
- Adult skill levels
- Benefit claimants – Tax credits, Housing Benefit and Council Tax benefit
- House prices
- Youth offending

Health

- Incidence of limiting long term illness
- Life expectancy
- Access to maternity services
- Low birth weight and infant mortality
- Breastfeeding
- Teenage conception
- Oral health
- Childhood obesity
- Childhood accident admission to hospital

33. During our inquiry on attendance this year – which used a similar methodology to this inquiry – we have seen how Children’s Services have continued to develop and refine cluster level data to help target services to meet the differing needs of each locality.



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34. The list of witnesses and site visits at the end of this report demonstrates the range of practitioners that we spoke to on our site visits and the services that we saw at first hand.
35. Arising from the discussions that took place on the day, but also taking into account the developments that we are aware of as a result of our inquiries this year, we made a number of recommendations.
36. We have directed the majority of our recommendations to the Director of Children's Services because it is officers within Children's Services who take the lead in supporting the Child Poverty Strategy Group, the partnership group, chaired by the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services, responsible for driving the city's child poverty strategy.
37. We acknowledge that the Director and his team will require the support of a wider range of partners, both within the council and across the broader city partnership, to respond to our recommendations.
38. At the time of our inquiry there was some uncertainty about the future of some debt advice services. We heard about the Financial Inclusion Fund which had paid for 11 debt advice workers in Leeds since 2006, some based with the CAB and some through other services. Waiting lists had reduced from 3 months to 2-3 weeks. We were presented with some case studies and heard how some people can become very isolated, such that doorstep lenders can appear to be their only 'friends'. The debt advisers work with people to maximise their income, including benefits, and to negotiate more affordable repayment schedules for loans, as appropriate.
39. We also had the chance to see the Credit Union branch which operates from the One Stop Centre at Dewsbury Road. The Credit Union branches are now included in the council's mainstream budget. Staff at the One Stop Centre all receive training in basic debt advice, so that they can refer customers on to an appropriate service, including making initial appointments for them.
40. We were pleased to learn that an extension of the debt advice service had been agreed for a further year, giving additional time to source future funding. We are also pleased about the commitment shown by the council to credit union facilities as an alternative to 'loan sharks'. We felt that it was very important that the longer term continuation of these services was secured.
- Recommendation 2** – That the Director of Children's Services reports to us within three months on how the council and its partners are seeking to ensure the continued viability of money advice and credit union facilities within the city.
41. We also discussed the role of all staff in being able to recognise where a young person or family that they are working with may benefit from support from other services besides their own service, and feeling adequately equipped to provide signposting information.
42. We heard some good examples of how staff are able to signpost families to other services that would be of benefit to them, for example from housing staff,



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and we would like to see this happening more frequently, with staff being aware of the range of other services available to a family.

Recommendation 3 – That the Director of Children’s Services reports back to us within three months on how he will ensure that workforce development plans are in place to increase front-line staff’s ability to recognise needs such as debt advice and fuel poverty and signpost people appropriately.

43. We discussed information sharing and the constraints that can arise where staff have fairly ‘low level’ concerns about a child’s wellbeing, that would not meet the safeguarding criteria, but where a shared awareness by professionals in contact with a family may lead to more effective support.

44. The witnesses we spoke to indicated that there may be some instances where this was possible, with the client’s permission. However, it was also stressed that services such as debt advice are provided under terms of strict confidentiality and in such cases staff are not able to pass on information to other services without overt consent, and would only break such confidentiality in a case where they felt that a child was at risk of abuse.

45. Often it took some time for a client to build up trust, for example with a debt advice worker, and the success of this service could be compromised by any breach of that trust.

46. We felt that there needs to be greater clarity about what information can be shared in such circumstances.

Recommendation 4 – That the Director of Children’s Services reports back to us in three months on how the concerns raised about information sharing can be addressed.

47. We were particularly concerned about low levels of take up of the free school meal entitlement, and some of the barriers that discourage children from claiming their entitlement.

48. We were pleased however to note that there is one single form to complete to claim council administered benefits (Housing and Council Tax Benefit) and free school meals. We were also told that the same information is used to assess eligibility for school clothing allowance and free school transport.

49. Benefits staff work closely with schools to track any changes in eligibility for free school meals, as well as confirming eligibility when a pupil moves between schools.

50. Nevertheless, it appears that there is still a stigma for some people in claiming free school meals. In other cases children may not take the meal that they are entitled to. We were particularly interested to hear about some schools that have introduced ‘grab-a-bag’ schemes, providing packed lunch style meals in school. We felt that this was a positive initiative to make school meals more attractive to a wider range of pupils.

Recommendation 5 – That the Director of Children’s Services reports back to us within three months on what is being done to increase the proportion of children and young people eligible for free school meals who are registered for this entitlement.



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51. We were pleased to learn about some of the work that was being undertaken in conjunction with social housing providers, in particular to tackle fuel poverty.

52. We heard about the work being done by Environment and Neighbourhoods staff to help local residents access schemes to help alleviate fuel poverty, including insulation schemes, solar panels and social tariffs. However, we also noted that a number of changes were taking place nationally in the initiatives available.

53. We also learned about Aire Valley Homes working with Jobcentre Plus on a Tenants into Work project. The project provided support for people in creating their CVs, carrying out job searches, interview techniques, self-employment advice and access to training. Over 3 years, 160 people had been helped off benefits and into work.

54. Aire Valley Homes also supports a Financial Inclusion Officer who can approach people early if they are getting into arrears on their rent and help them to access support to manage all of their financial issues.

55. Each of these initiatives were seen as benefiting the landlord as well as the tenant. We would like to see similar initiatives being explored with private sector landlords if possible, perhaps linked to the registration scheme.

Recommendation 6 – That the Director of Children’s Services reports back to us within three months on the potential for the Child Poverty Strategy to engage with private sector housing providers on a similar model to social housing providers in combating the effects of poverty.

56. As we toured the One Stop Centres we noticed that there was very little information available about services for children and families in the Centres, although there were plenty of families attending for various reasons. We felt that this was a missed opportunity to raise awareness of services that may be able to support some of our families.

Recommendation 7 – That the Director of Children’s Services makes more information about services for children and families available at One Stop Centres.

57. Finally, our visit to RISE in particular provided us with an example of how young people with low aspirations are being supported to become ready for work.

58. The Children’s University, being piloted in Seacroft, is a national initiative for 7-14 year olds, which encourages children to commit their spare time and energy to exciting and innovative learning activities and experiences which take place outside normal school hours. The scheme is based on the Bronze, Silver and Gold levels similar to the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme.

59. Spirit Alive is a scheme linked to the Olympic games, which aims to develop enterprise and leadership skills. Although aimed at all ages it is generally taken up at primary level. The scheme has 4 blocks (known as villages) Art, Business, Sport and Wellbeing.

60. We also heard about Space Two which is based at Leeds Media Centre and has received funding from the NHS for its Tracker Project. Targeted as a long term preventative model it is aimed at upper



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primary and lower high school age children and is based on a group of 15 young people. It is centred on a weekly meeting on an individual basis and aims at listening to the child. The idea is to engage young people in a number of activities along with individual support and counselling. It looks at ways of dealing with low attainment, exclusion, poor health, low attendance, poor life choices, teenage pregnancy, social care referrals and looked after children.

61. We want all children in Leeds to aspire to achieve their full potential and to receive the support and encouragement they need to acquire the basic literacy, numeracy and employability skills. We believe that this will provide them with the basic building blocks to raise and achieve their aspirations.

64. We have heard about the commitment to early intervention and preventative approaches which are designed to break the cycle of disadvantage. This is particularly building on some of the initiatives that we saw during our inquiry, such as the Family Nurse Partnership.

65. We are also aware that a number of other scrutiny inquiries carried out by other Boards have related to the impact of child poverty and to raising aspirations; for example the complementary work on jobs and skills being carried out by the Sustainable Economy and Culture Scrutiny Board, the inquiry on fuel poverty by the Regeneration Scrutiny Board and the work being undertaken by the Health and Wellbeing and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board on Health Inequalities.

66. This is further evidence of the cross-cutting approach being taken to these themes across the council. We expect to see further examples in the coming year.

Postscript

62. Through our work on our three major inquiries during 2011/12 (external placements for children in care; school attendance; and increasing the number of young people in education, employment and training) we have seen some of the work that is being undertaken to address the impact of child poverty and to raise young people's aspirations in the city.

63. In particular we have seen how services are increasingly working in closer partnership at a very local level in clusters to target local families and tailor local solutions within a city-wide framework of outcome based accountability and restorative practice approaches.



Monitoring arrangements

Standard arrangements for monitoring the outcome of the Board's recommendations will apply.

The decision-makers to whom the recommendations are addressed will be asked to submit a formal response to the recommendations, including an action plan and timetable, normally within two months.

Following this the Scrutiny Board will determine any further detailed monitoring, over and above the standard quarterly monitoring of all scrutiny recommendations.

Reports and Publications Submitted

- Extracts from IDeA toolkit for Child Poverty Needs Assessment
- Child Poverty: Highlights and Exceptions for Scrutiny to Consider
- Improvement Priority TP3b – Reduce the number of children in poverty – October 2010 accountability report
- Common risk factors for children, young people and families at risk of poor outcomes
- Child Poverty Act summary
- Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) Combating child poverty and raising aspirations inquiry – Background information
- Child Poverty Act Briefing Paper April 2010
- Child Poverty Unit – Pyramid of Factors that impact upon child poverty
- Leeds Child Poverty Basket of Performance Indicators
- The Foundation Years, independent review on poverty
- Draft Leeds Child Poverty Needs Assessment
- Presentation on child poverty
- Visit information – Beeston and Holbeck
- Visit information – South Seacroft

Dates of Scrutiny

November 2010 – working group (Councillors Judith Chapman, Geoff Driver, Alan Lamb, Brenda Lancaster, Mr Britten and Professor Gosden)

November 2010 – Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

20 January 2011 – Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

17 February 2011 – site visits

South Seacroft

RISE building
South Seacroft One Stop Centre
Seacroft Children's Centre
Parklands Children's Centre

Beeston and Holbeck

Dewsbury Road One Stop Centre
Dewsbury Road Library
New Beverley Children's Centre
Holbeck/Beeston Hill Jobshop, Tunstall Road



Witnesses Heard

Councillor Judith Blake, Executive Member (Children's Services)
Councillor Jane Dowson, Executive Member (Learning)
Sally Threlfall, Chief Officer for Early Years and Integrated Youth Support Service, Children's Services
John Freeman, Education Leeds
Lisa Martin, Children's Services
Dave Roberts, Senior Policy and Information Officer, City Development
Jane Hopkins, Service Manager Jobs and Skills Service, Environment & Neighbourhoods
Diana Towler, External Relations Manager, Jobcentre Plus
Liz Bailey, Health and Wellbeing Improvement Manager, Adult Social Care
Rob McCartney, Housing Strategy & Commissioning Manager, Environment & Neighbourhoods
Martyn Long
Chris Smyth, Leeds City Credit Union
Diane Lyons, Chief Executive Leeds CAB
Maggie Vantoch-Wood, Financial Inclusion Fund, Debt Caseworker
John Ashton, Dewsbury Road One Stop Centre
Linda Baldwin, Education Benefits Officer
Paul Carter, Financial Inclusion Officer, Aire Valley Homes
Simon Lonsdale, JobCentre Plus
Robert Curtis, Fuel Poverty Officer, Environment Policy Team
Jacqui Atkinson, Yorkshire Bank
Lorraine Lee, Leeds Libraries
Amanda Ashe, Head of Children's Centre Services
Christine Coopman, Children's Centre Manager
Charlotte Harker
Tammie Millar
Wendy Brown
Paul Chandler, Course Team Manager, Leeds College of Building
Robina Mir, Parenting Apart Together Manager
Kathryn Ashworth, Relate Leeds and Parenting Apart Together
Jonathan Dore, Leeds CAB
Jan Jackson, Customer Services Manager, One Stop Centre
Simon Swift, ENE Homes
Nadine Statham, Assistant Welfare Rights Unit Manager
Kam Sangra, Programme Manager, Job Shop
Sharon House
Sharon Marshall, Deputy Manager, Seacroft Children's Centre
Joanne Ingham, Family Outreach Worker
Karen Herrington, Teacher, Seacroft Children's Centre
Mark Wilson JobCentre Plus Adviser
Lynn Turner, Adviser Manager, JobCentre Plus
Joanne Ingham – Family Outreach
Cathy Brayshaw, Family Nurse
Kay Kendall, Manager, Parklands Children's Centre Manager
Alison Reddix Teacher, Parklands Children's Centre
Keith Nicholson, Leeds CAB
Jess Hawker, Leeds CAB
Viv Gibbons, Extended Services Cluster Coordinator, Seacroft
Alan Bolton, David Young Community Academy
Emma Hopkinson, Space2, Young People's Project Coordinator
Dawn Fuller, Space2, Strategic Director

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Report author: Kate Arcott**