

Report of the Director of Children & Families

Report to Executive Board

Date: 24th June 2020

Subject: Update on Thriving: The Child Poverty Strategy for Leeds



Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary

1. Main issues

- This report was requested in November’s Executive Board meeting, following a discussion on ‘Thriving: The Child Poverty Strategy for Leeds’. It aims to provide an update on the implementation of the Child Poverty Strategy. It is the first of two reports which will be provided each year, an annual report in April and an interim report in November. This report is the baseline structure of the annual report, and will provide an update on the Impact Workstreams, and detail the impact measures that will be implemented.
- Poverty is estimated to affect 173,600 people across Leeds (after housing costs are deducted from income). Child poverty is increasing, in Leeds and nationally, and it is having devastating impacts on children, the adults children become, and on the societies in which poor children live. Latest local data for 2018/19 has revealed 23% of children under 16 (34,862) in Leeds lived in poverty (before housing costs are deducted from income), an increase of 3% since 2016. Nationally, 18% of children under 16 lived in poverty (before housing costs are deducted from income).
- In work poverty is also increasing, with 73% of young people living in poverty having at least one adult in work across the UK (a 3% increase in a year). The statistics show that Leeds is not on its own in the prevalence and negative impacts of child

poverty. Its story is not unique, the debate is not original, and the impacts of poverty in Leeds are comparable to the impacts of poverty everywhere.

- In 2016, the Government removed the statutory target to eradicate child poverty by 2020, and the commitment to measure and report on the proportion of children living in poverty. The changes also remove a requirement to produce a national child poverty strategy, or for local authorities to produce local child poverty strategies.
- It is recognised that the ultimate aim is to eradicate poverty, and that is the long term goal for Leeds- however, to do this, a national approach that allocates resources to tackle poverty, decreases in work poverty, and strengthens the safety net that children, young people and families rely on is crucial. Whilst Leeds City Council will continue to work to eradicate poverty with the powers that they have, in the short term there is a need to mitigate the most negative impacts of poverty and inequality on young people.
- Researchers from the University of York have said that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to expose and prolong existing inequalities, and create significant new forms of hardship and vulnerabilities. Save the Children have stated that children are becoming the pandemic's biggest victims of its social and economic impacts. Children's Society have said that COVID-19 is likely to have a particularly pernicious impact on children already living in poverty in the UK. In addition both the Education Policy Institute and the Northern Powerhouse Partnership have been called for additional pupil premium funding allocations. The Northern Powerhouse are requesting that an entitlement of at least £700 for every secondary school pupil on free school meals to fund extra weekly tuition. Across England this would equate to funding of over £300 million. Any additional increase of funding allocated to schools and targeted to vulnerable children will be welcomed by school leaders and will enable them to begin to 'close the gap' which the COVID-19 situation is likely to have made significantly worse for the most vulnerable learners.
- The charity StepChange has said that 4.6 million households risked building up dangerous levels of debt because of the pandemic, and families who are more likely to have problem debt at the start of the pandemic have seen their incomes fall more than families less likely to have problem debt. They have released figures which show that since late March, as many as 1.2 million people have fallen behind on utility bill payments, 820,000 on council tax, and 590,000 on rent. There has been an inequality in wealth since the beginning of lockdown, with research from the Resolution Foundation showing that as many as two in five high-income families have experienced budget gains in the crisis, compared with one in eight low-income households. Phil Andrew, chief executive of StepChange, has warned that poorer families will face a "tsunami" of household debt and arrears due to the crisis.
- To ensure that the COVID-19 pandemic does not cause rates of children living in poverty to drastically increase, a national approach is needed. A national child poverty strategy should be created, and the statutory requirement for each local authority to have a child poverty strategy should be reintroduced. Funding should be

allocated to each Local Authority to mitigate the impact of child poverty, and schools should receive additional funding to support children's mental, emotional and developmental needs, which may have been negatively impacted as a result of the pandemic and measures to contain it.

- Policy in Practice have advised that three main recommendations should be made to support the country through this pandemic. They have called for the savings limit in Universal Credit to be suspended for the next 12 months, the two-child benefit limit and the benefit cap to be suspended (or at least increased to £2,500 per month) for the duration of the pandemic and the increased generosity of the welfare system to be maintained after April 2021.
- In addition to this, The Children's Society recommends that:
 - a. The Government should ensure Free School Meal vouchers are easily attainable, without a significant time lag, and valid for exchange in a range of accessible shops. These should be available to all school children, regardless of their family's immigration status.
 - b. The Government should temporarily uplift Child Benefit Payments by £10 per child per week to help these families during this period of financial uncertainty.
 - c. Advance payments of Universal Credit should be made as non-repayable grants, rather than as loans.
 - d. The Government should introduce a £1000 increase in the child element of Child Tax Credit to parallel the uplift in Working Tax Credit.
 - e. The Government urgently needs to suspend the Tax Credit income disregard for reductions in earnings at least for the financial year 2020-21
 - f. A significant portion of the announced hardship fund should be allocated to Local Welfare Provision. Such support should be accessible to all who need it, regardless of immigration status

2. Best Council Plan Implications (click [here](#) for the latest version of the Best Council Plan)

- This strategy directly relates to most of the Best Council Plan priorities:
- tackling poverty, helping everyone benefit from the economy to their full potential
- reducing health inequalities and supporting active lifestyles
- making Leeds the best city for children and young people to grow up in
- improving the quality of lives and growing the economy through cultural and creative activities
- providing homes of the right quality, type and affordability in the right places and minimising homelessness
- keeping people safe from harm and promoting community respect and resilience

3. Resource Implications

- Each project will have an individual resource implication. Where possible, a partnership approach will be implemented, to pool resources from a variety of directorates and sectors across Leeds.

Recommendations

- a) That Executive Board note the strategic framework in place to mitigate the impact of child poverty, and the work being undertaken by the council and its partners in the key areas of activity.
- b) Note the data overview, current work and reporting updates outlined in the report.
- c) Note the officer responsible for implementation is the Chief Officer, Partnerships & Health by December 2022.
- d) That Executive Board have an understanding of the potential impact of COVID-19 on child poverty, and note the calls for a national approach to mitigating the impact of child poverty.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the work that has been undertaken, response to COVID-19 and outputs and outcomes of each Impact Workstream under Thriving: The Child Poverty Strategy for Leeds. The report, also details the way in which the Thriving Strategy will be monitored and evaluated. Two reports a year will be provided to Executive Board- an interim report in November, and an annual progress report in April.
- 1.2 Child poverty is at the heart of the Children and Young People's Plan, and there is a focus on mitigating the impact of poverty and reducing poverty within all of the key areas of the council. We have a strong track record of engaging children, young people and families, and we will build on this to embed a qualitative impact analysis under every workstream that is based on experiences of children and parents.

2. Background information

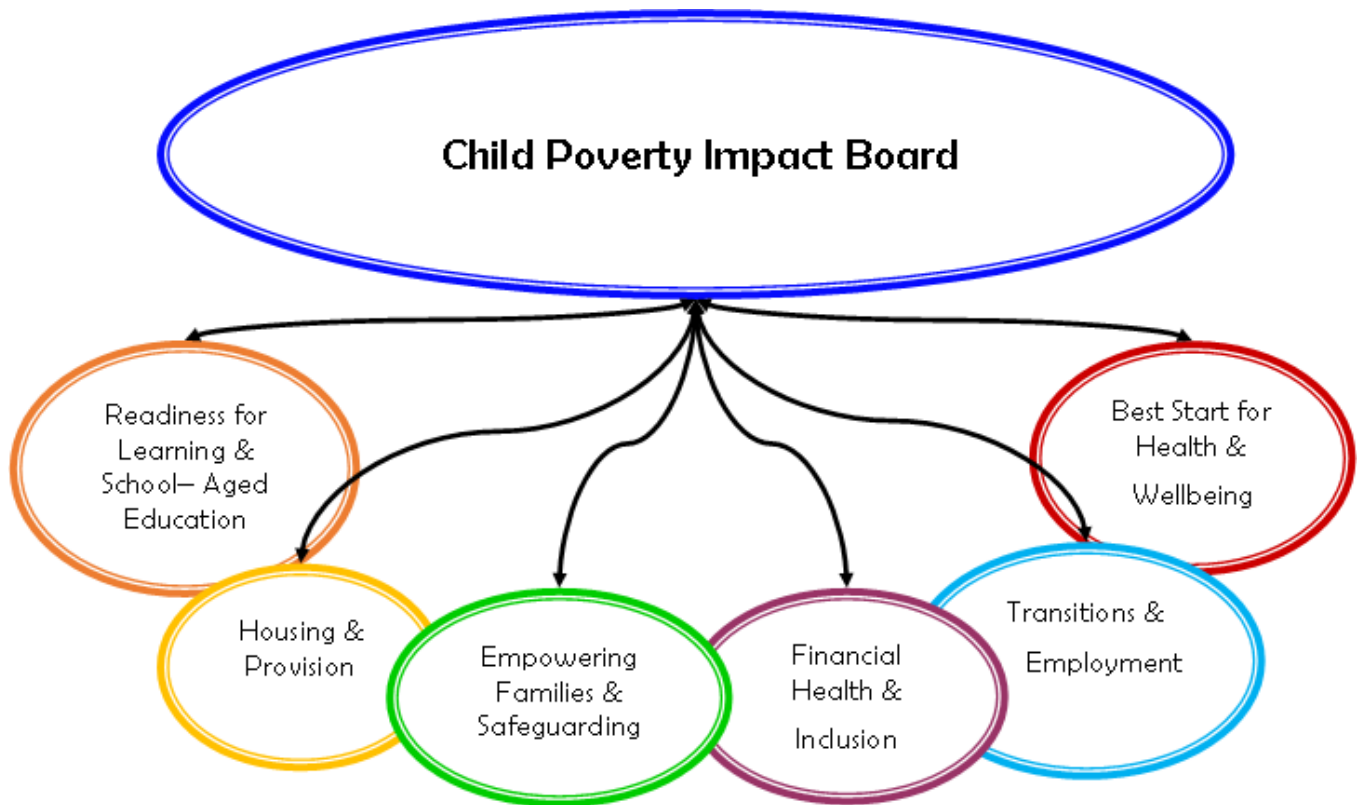
- 2.1 The strategy was created in partnership with children, young people and parents. Tackling poverty forms a key part of achieving the council's vision to build a strong economy in a compassionate city, detailed in the council's Best Council Plan.
- 2.2 The strategy should be understood within the specific context of Leeds, and the city's approach to tackling poverty and inequality. The localities approach, which has been developed by Communities & Environments, has facilitated a greater partnership approach both at local and city wide level. The approach seeks to adopt a new flexible, collaborative working, focussed on our least advantaged communities. At its heart is more joined up, effective service provision, with key

services - housing, communities, children's, adults social care - adopting a new working model with a very clear locality focus.

- 2.3 An example of how partners across the city are joining up to mitigate the impact of poverty related issues can be seen with the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Leeds City Council colleagues from a range of directorates, schools, food banks, business partners, third sector, individuals, families and communities are working together to ensure that food and key services are being provided to those who are vulnerable across Leeds. Once immediate service and care has been provided, there will need to be significant focus on the likely long term economic impact on families, communities, schools and businesses across Leeds.
- 2.4 Relevant reports include: *Best Council Plan Refresh 2019/20*, *Inclusive Growth Strategy: Delivery, Tackling Poverty and Inequality*, *Children & Young Peoples Plan* and *Health and Wellbeing Strategy*.

3. Main issues

- 3.1 The intention behind the Thriving strategy is to weave together existing resources, organisations, projects and people to co-ordinate the work around poverty to maximise impact and provide long lasting, sustainable organisational changes.
- 3.2 The delivery is conducted through inclusive, equal partnerships, made up of children and young people, council directorates, schools, education provisions, academics, third sector, private sector, public sectors, and community representatives. These partnerships use their knowledge and expertise to investigate the impact of poverty on a specific area of children's lives, and then work together to create projects that mitigate this impact.
- 3.3 Thriving has five fundamental principles:
- 1) All work needs to be informed by the voices of children, young people and parents
 - 2) All projects need to work with a wide variety of partners
 - 3) The focus is on changing structures, not individuals
 - 4) We need to reframe the language that is used
 - 5) Research is incorporated into every project
- 3.4 An overview of the work that has already commenced, or that is planned to start, is detailed for each workstream below, in addition to the impact measures and each workstreams' response to COVID-19.



3.5 Workstream 1: Readiness for Learning & School Aged Education

3.6 *We want to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of children and young people who live in poverty*

3.7 Overview of the activities that have taken place

3.8 The 3A's Strategy

3.9 The 3A's Strategy aims to reduce the gap in educational attainment for all vulnerable children and young people, has been launched. This strategy is focussed around the collective drive to improve the Attendance, Achievement and Attainment of all our children and young people, but particularly those who are vulnerable and/or less advantaged. A Leeds 'Year of Reading' has been launched in partnership with Booktrust. This partnership will bring over £1 million worth of books and resources into the city across 3 years, with much of this being targeted at areas of high deprivation. Our aim is that over time we will have narrowed the gap between 4 and 5 year olds on Free School Meals compared to 4 and 5 year olds not on Free School Meals by working with them, their families and professionals earlier and more effectively.

3.10 A group of schools and staff have been identified to participate in poverty proofing the school day training, the first iteration of which has taken place online. Golden tickets will be sent out in June to families eligible to access funded childcare for 2 year olds. It is expected that the number of families eligible for the 2 year old offer will have increased due to Covid-19 and the impact on employment. Therefore, we will closely monitor the number of eligible families to ensure the sufficiency of places while early years settings start to re-open.

3.11 Period Products

3.12 The city wide approach to tackling period poverty is based on a collaboration between Children & Families and Communities, and includes partnerships with third, public, private, education and academic sectors. The approach has been led by young people, and partnerships have been developed to identify current practice and develop a scheme that meets the need in a non-stigmatising, sustainable way.

3.13 Period products that are in packaging that has been designed by a young person in Leeds will be supplied for free in schools and community hubs from June 2020. Products in plain packaging have been supplied to 129 schools and 39 community hubs since autumn 2019. An app is currently in development, which will enable the user to locate their nearest products and advise how they can access them. An officer is sitting on the government's taskforce on tackling stigma and shame around periods.

3.14 COVID-19 Response

3.15 The lockdown measures and the partial closure of schools has implications for child poverty in Leeds, and across the country. We have put in place the following measures to mitigate the impact of differing aspects of child and family poverty:

- a) Schools have continued to provide for children eligible for free school meals. This has been in the form of daily grab bags, weekly hampers or vouchers which can be redeemed in local supermarkets. The Government launched a National Voucher Scheme through its provider, Edenred, but this has been problematic and led to delays in families accessing their entitlement.
- b) Schools are providing work for pupils to complete at home. Some of this is on line. However, this disadvantages pupils who do not have access to digital devices in the home. Many schools have responded by loaning these out or purchasing them on behalf of pupils. The Department of Education has a national scheme to support vulnerable learners with an allocated social worker who currently have no access to a digital device (laptop or tablet), which they require to progress their learning or mitigate against isolation if a care leaver, which can include a router with a monthly data allowance for a period of 6 months, if required.

The Department of Education calculated that for children and young people in Leeds with an allocated social worker, this allocation would be 2,181 digital devices (laptops or tablets) each with a bag and 303 routers, which have a set monthly data allowance for a period of six months. A 'forecast survey' was returned to the Department of Education in early May, where Leeds City Council confirmed it would require the full allocation for its vulnerable learners

There is a separate scheme for vulnerable year 10 students attending local authority schools in Leeds, which has also received an allocation of digital devices (laptops or tablets) each with a bag and an allocation of routers. There is a separate process for academies, administered centrally. 343 devices were originally allocated with a shortfall of 39 devices following the identification of students meeting the criteria in maintained schools. This was challenged and it has been confirmed that we will receive the additional devices in due course.

- c) Girls not attending schools may be in need of period products and lack the means of buying them. These have been provided in three ways: through direct deliveries sent out through the council when applicable, through the Community Care Hubs

for distribution with food parcels, and by being included once a month in the Catering Leeds hampers. Schools have been reminded that they can still access products through the Government scheme and the Leeds scheme.

- d) Schools closed on 23rd March to all but the children of key workers and vulnerable children. There is widespread concern both locally and nationally about the numbers of vulnerable children actually attending school. For example, in the week beginning 27th April, only 13.56% of the total number of vulnerable pupils in Leeds attended school (though this is a higher rate of attendance than the English average of 5%). Schools and social care are making regular contact with pupils to ensure they remain safe and well. This is in the form of regular calls or welfare visits. There is little doubt, however, that those children who are disadvantaged are likely to suffer more from school closures and their educational progress will be impacted.
- e) There is a wide range of on-line learning opportunities available to support pupils' home learning. For example, the BBC has created a series of daily bitesize lessons. In Leeds we have collated lists of good learning resources and also signposted and created materials to support pupils' emotional well-being. There is guidance for parents, with activities and creative ideas for families to do during lockdown on the Child Friendly Leeds website.
- f) Poverty Proofing the School Day training for staff is going ahead on line so that it can be rolled out in September as planned.

3.16 Plans are underway to help pupils throughout the recovery phase during which schools will reopen. Different services are coming together to anticipate the nature and level of need following lockdown.

3.17 **How outputs will be monitored**

3.18 3A's:

- Take up of 2 Year Old offer
- Good Level of Development in areas of deprivation and narrowing of gap to all peers (evidenced in the Annual Standards Report)
- Number of children and young people accessing and completing the summer reading challenge.

3.19 Period Products:

- Number of users of the app, number of products provided across all schools, libraries and community hubs, qualitative impact on wellbeing and inclusion.

3.20 **How outcomes will be monitored**

3.21 Impact Case Studies will be provided for the interim report in November demonstrating how positive outcomes are being achieved.

3.22 **Workstream 2: Housing & Provision**

3.23 *We want every family to live in housing that is safe, appropriate and affordable.*

3.24 **Overview of the activities that have taken place**

- 3.25 The service has previously shared a range of activities undertaken that support the wider delivery of the Child Poverty Strategy, with these being now embedded in day to day functions of the housing service. To maximise impact, the focus in the year ahead is on two specific areas of work:
- a. The implementation of Selective Licensing and the opportunity this brings to improve housing conditions, identify more specialist needs and offer wider support to families
 - b. Developing the work of the enhanced income service to ensure we maximise support to vulnerable tenants, seeking to maximise household income through a range of benefit and Universal Credit related support
- 3.26 Between April and November 2019, the enhanced income team worked with 1,819 tenants and have been able to secure around £2.13m in additional income for them.
- 3.27 The team have also made changes to the way their activity and outcomes are recorded so that we are able to identify the households with children.
- Between April and November 2019 we have worked with 372 households with children and have been able to secure around £559k in additional income.
 - The average amount secured for each household with children is around £1,500
 - We have been able to secure income for households with children from 16 different sources.
- 3.28 With regards to Selective Licensing, the scheme is now fully designated and in operation. The service is currently developing a comprehensive implementation plan that will fully incorporate activities and interventions from all key stakeholders including schools, Safer Leeds, safeguarding, NHS and CCG's, Children and Adult services as well as the local community. The aim is to not only tackle poor housing conditions but also address individual and family needs to make tenancies more sustainable and fit for purpose.

3.29 COVID-19 Response

- 3.30 As previously reported to the Executive Board, the housing focus for the year is on two specific areas of work; the implementation of Selective Licensing and the opportunity this brings to improve housing conditions and support for families and developing the enhanced income service to ensure we maximise household income through a range of benefit and Universal Credit related support.
- 3.31 Selective Licensing:
- 3.32 Due to restrictions in place the full implementation of Selective Licensing in both Harehills and Beeston has been delayed. Whilst processing of licence applications continues and full advice and guidance is being issued, we have not been able to commence the intensive property inspection regime as planned. However, the service continues to ensure processes are followed and procedures are in place to ensure the inspections can commence once restrictions are relaxed or lifted.
- 3.33 In the meantime, officers are liaising with local community and support groups to offer support and advice to vulnerable tenants and families in these deprived areas.

We have identified an increase in allegations of harassment cases where landlords may be pressuring tenants in rent arrears. We have established a close working arrangement with colleagues in Leeds Housing Options to put a robust referral pathway in place and ensure landlords are unable to exploit the most vulnerable tenants, the majority of which are often families.

3.34 Enhanced Income Service: We have moved the service provided by Housing Officers Income and Enhanced Income Officers to home based working. Our officers have continued to support tenants with income and benefit issues by telephone and online. The challenges we have faced include the following:

- A significant increase in the number of tenants claiming UC. We have continued to deliver the existing service offer by phone or online. We increased the resources available to deal with verifications on the landlord portal during peak demand.
- There has been an issue of people who have access to the internet but they are unclear or unable how to make applications. Officers have successfully talked tenants through the online applications on the phone.
- Tenants who don't have internet access can claim UC by phone, but the lines initially had long wait times to be answered. We raised the issue with DWP who clarified which tenants needed to use the line and increased resources to deal with new claims. We are working with colleagues in Benefits to identify ways tenants without internet access can claim Housing Benefit and Discretionary Housing Payment.
- Our plans going forward are to reintroduce face to face support for tenants, when it is safe to do so, and this is likely to remain the main way of providing the service once the emergency situation is over. However, we are likely to be providing the service remotely for some time yet and we would be looking to continue to develop remote delivery in specific situations where this supports improved service delivery.
- More generally, Housing Leeds in response to COVID-19 have issued regular email updates to over 33,000 tenants signposting a range of health and well-being information including Active Leeds 'healthy at home' and Child Friendly Leeds online resources.
- To support our vulnerable customers a Lettings Panel was set up to deal with emergency moves during Covid-19. Over the last few weeks the panel have successfully completed 18 lettings into Council homes and one letting into a Housing Association property.
- Carried out over 7,000 essential repairs and 2,600 essential gas safety checks

3.35 How outputs will be monitored

- The number of property inspections (within and outside of Selective Licensing areas) and the number of hazards identified and removed
- Number of households with children given additional support by the Enhanced Income Team
- Amount of additional income secured to households with families.
- The number of support referrals from Housing Officer Income

3.36 How outcomes will be monitored

3.37 Our Housing Officers support families with complexities including arrears prevention, reuniting families, securing work and those fleeing domestic violence.

Please see Appendix 1 for detailed case studies, which will be provided with the two reports per year, to demonstrate outcomes of this workstream.

3.38 Workstream 3: Empowering Families & Safeguarding

3.39 *We want to change the structure around social care to better support children, young people and families living in poverty.*

3.40 Overview of the activities that have taken place

3.41 Within this workstream, the main project is 'Poverty Proofing Social Work Practice'. The British Association of Social Work has been developing an anti-poverty practice guide to support members in their work with service users living in poverty. Leeds will work with BASC and key academics to develop a model of 'poverty proofing practice' that aims to train social workers and key staff in poverty and its impacts- and support families in mitigating the impact of poverty. There has been a substantial amount of preliminary work to establish the best method of developing this framework, with key collaborations with academics and the Poverty Truth Commission.

3.42 A master class for social workers on the topic of poverty with Professors Brid Featherstone and Kate Morris was held in Leeds. Work with the University of Leeds to look at the best way to turn academic findings on topics of child poverty into useful information for practitioners has started. Research into the understandings of social workers in relation to poverty is ongoing. Workshops have been held with Heads of Service within Social Care to look at the impact of poverty on social work practice.

3.43 We will: map all services relating to poverty so that all social workers can access the information; ensure that all social work students and newly qualified social workers have training on poverty delivered by those with lived experience; ensure best practice is shared; connect social work teams with the Financial Inclusion team and other services who have extensive knowledge on welfare rights.

3.44 A resource hub has been established at Hunslet Hall office, providing families who are working with social workers with essential items, such as toiletries and clothes.

3.45 Current work is being undertaken with Leeds based Children & Families social work service teams, Leeds Beckett University, LCC Financial Inclusion team and the University of Leeds.

3.46 COVID-19 Response

3.47 To bring services together a "Tackling Poverty Group" has been set up to develop a Framework for Social Workers around poverty and connect services. The group has met twice since lockdown with the focus of the work being around responding the immediate needs of vulnerable children and families. The group is led by the Children's Principal Social Worker and includes social work team managers from each of the areas of the city, Families First Service Manager, Front Door Service Manager, Child Protection/ISU Service Manager and colleagues from the Financial Inclusion Team.

- 3.48 To help respond to the impact of COVID-19, all social workers received information during the first week of lockdown on how and where to access support and advice for families.
- 3.49 The Early Help Hubs have co-ordinated referrals for assistance direct from families and practitioners for delivery of essential items such as food parcels, toiletries, medication.
- 3.50 The Early Help Hubs have also worked closely with the Care Leavers service to ensure care leavers are supported during the lockdown and isolation. This has included delivery of essential items as well as more personal items such as birthday cakes for care leavers who have birthdays during lockdown.
- 3.51 The Workforce Development Offer has been adapted to a virtual offer and the work around tackling poverty is part of inductions and training for newly qualified social workers.
- 3.52 Weekly Bronze meetings bringing all services working with children together have been established across the 3 areas of the city to ensure a localised response to the needs for children and families during the pandemic and lockdown.

3.53 How outputs will be monitored

There will be a number of output and impact measures integrated within this work, including:

- Number of people engaged in consultation
- Number of people receiving welfare rights training
- Number of student social workers and newly qualified social workers reached
- Impact of changes to system on social workers
- Impact on families experiencing poverty and social work professionals

3.54 How outcomes will be monitored

- 3.55 Case studies will be provided in November's report.

3.56 Workstream 4: Financial Health & Inclusion

- 3.57 *We want every family to be equipped with the support, guidance and safety net needed to live financially secure and stable lives.*

3.58 Overview of the activities that have taken place

- 3.59 **Healthy Holidays** The programme aims to support families and children access meals and activities during the school holidays. During 2019, funding for the Healthy Holiday projects totalled £549,598. Leeds Community Foundation managed the delivery of 77 projects, reaching 5,441 unique children, and 903 adults. All of the programmes provided lunch, and some also provided breakfast and/or food parcels. Many used food from Rethink Food and FareShare, and Leeds Catering offered food preparation. FareShare alone distributed 15.21 tonnes of intercepted food, which would otherwise have been considered as waste, equating to 4,375

trays/crates of food with an estimated retail value of £21,645. The Healthy Holidays Task & Finish Group secured council, government and external funding for 2020.

3.60 **Free School Meals** In order to improve take-up figures for Free School Meals, Children & Families have been exploring ways to engage with schools and families. This has included the Health and Wellbeing service working with the Council Tax and Benefits service to provide training for school staff to support families and pupils with claiming their entitlement: and the launching of a new Free School Meals Toolkit with the support of other services across the council. The toolkit provides essential advice and information to those who are directly involved in free school meals and those who support children and families.

3.61 **School Savings Clubs** Schemes are currently running in primary schools. In order to increase knowledge, awareness and take up the Financial Inclusion Team will work closely with Leeds Credit Union to increase the number of schools engaged.

3.62 **Staff Training** Four sessions have been undertaken this year. Sessions have had low attendance, and so this is an area that needs significant drive and will be an immediate focus for the new position within the Financial Inclusion team. A 'toolbox' of new training materials will be developed, and a push to make the training more of a mandatory requirement for all staff will be made.

3.63 COVID-19 Response

3.64 The delivery of the 2020 Healthy Holidays scheme has been changed significantly to adhere to social distancing measures. Leeds City Council committed £150,000 to Healthy Holidays projects for 2020 with a further £170,000 being secured from other donations including JIMBOs and Direct Line. The application process for funding bids closed prior to the enforcement of social distancing within the UK. As a result 31 organisations are now delivering significantly modified online and offline activities that can be done safely by children and young people. This includes a range of activities including sport, physical activity, creative arts, cookery gardening and mental wellbeing support, alongside a meal. Further funding will be made available to organisations as the situation evolves and lockdown measures are lifted. In addition, Leeds Community Foundations has been assured by Department for Education that the Holiday Activity Fund 2020 funding of £450,000 is currently still allocated for project in the school summer holidays.

3.65 Free School Meal entitlement has been a critical indicator for schools and catering providers to ensure that families most in need are receiving food and support needed. In April 2020 The Government launched the National Voucher Scheme to support families with £15 per week for each FSM eligible child. Schools have been able to make their own decision as to whether to offer vouchers or work with their catering service to offer daily meals or weekly hampers. Schools in which LCC is the catering provider are distributing grab bags, hampers and hot meals which equates to 21,000 meals each week to children on Free School Meals. There have been reports from schools of a number of issues with the National Voucher Scheme, including problems issuing vouchers and delays in schools receiving registration information. These issues are beginning to be resolved and have also been reported nationally. The national Bite Back campaign have produce a

shopping list and menu ideas for families in receipt of the National Voucher Scheme and are delivering live cooking sessions each day.

- 3.66 Estimates by the Food Foundation thinktank show that about 5 million people in households with children have struggled to put food on the table during the pandemic. The government have announced that the Free School Meal voucher scheme, for which 1.3 million children qualify, and that has been running since March, will be stopped in July. Charities have expressed concern that children will go hungry throughout the holidays, with more families facing poverty as they lose jobs and income due to the pandemic. The Department of Education has suggested that it could expand the Healthy Holidays scheme, however no further details have been provided. The Healthy Holidays scheme covers 50,000 young people in 17 local authorities.
- 3.67 The Health and Wellbeing Service have been working with the Council Tax and Benefits Service to support schools and communicate information relating to FSM and COVID-19. A new E-learning training course is being developed to support schools and replace the face-to-face training course previously offered.
- 3.68 It has also been noted that there has been an accelerated increase in the number of FSM claims since COVID-19. The number of FSM awards in March was at 25,874 and by the beginning of May this was at 26,624, which has been an increase of 750 in a two month period. In comparison, the increase in FSM awards from January to March 2020 was 610. This rate of acceleration will be monitored over the coming months.
- 3.69 Recruitment of schools for credit union savings clubs, and staff training is currently suspended, with work being undertaken to review resources and materials.
- 3.70 Work has been taking place in Leeds to understand and to get a picture of and understanding of the disproportionate or differential impact on inequality that is happening due to COVID-19. This work is supported by Voluntary Action Leeds, Forum Central and a range of partners who provide specialist support to the city's diverse communities. This includes starting to gather evidence of the impact on Communities of Interest some of which is evidence based and some is anecdotal. It also shows that there is also overlap across many Communities of Interest. This mirrors work that is being undertaken by Public Health on the direct and wider health inequalities of COVID-19.
- 3.71 This work will form a key part of the recovery work that is being undertaken by the Communities Team and partners to ensure that the needs of those Communities of Interest who have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 are addressed to prevent further widening of the inequalities gap.
- 3.72 All aspects of the financial health and inclusion work stream are under constant review and will be adapted as lockdown measure are lifted.
- 3.73 How outputs will be monitored**
- **Healthy Holidays** The number of: FSM children attending HH sessions, overall children attending HH sessions, meals provided, and activities provided

- **Free School Meals** The number of children accessing FSM in Leeds and the number of awareness raising activities/sessions held to promote entitlement
- **School Savings Clubs** The overall number of schools accessing the school savings clubs, number of new schools accessing school savings clubs, number of awareness raising sessions to promote opportunity

3.74 **How outcomes will be monitored**

3.75 **Healthy Holidays** Case studies and an in depth evaluation to include the above indicators will be provided.

3.76 **Free School Meals** Updates will be provided every six months, please note the number of children accessing FSM in Leeds data is updated annually, released in June.

3.77 **School Savings Clubs** Updates will be provided on the indicators every 6 months.

3.78 **Workstream 5: Transitions & Employment**

3.79 *We want every young person and family to have the relevant skills and experience to access and secure well paid employment.*

3.80 **Overview of the activities that have taken place**

3.81 In 2018, a partnership between Children & Families and Employment and Skills was developed, to support parents and carers into work. There were 122 parents consulted, with a 43% return rate. The Family Learning course received the highest number of enrolments of any previous provision on site, with 18 parents enrolled, and 14 who completed the course. All completers had one to one information, advice and guidance support and recorded improvements on their individual progress journey. Individual information, advice and guidance sessions have taken place with 8 parents wanting to explore getting back into learning/work.

3.82 This project is currently evolving, with plans around working with a variety of partners to provide volunteering/ work experience/ work, as well as working with parents to develop the 'soft skills' and experiences that are needed to thrive in a working environment. The initial approach was piloted in a small number of Children's Centres. The impact of this was assessed, and a possible expansion across the city is currently being looked at. The exact approach will be adapted to the needs of each community.

3.83 A further 912 residents enrolled in 2019/20 academic year on family learning courses delivered in children's centres, inner city primary schools and community centres. The Council's Adult Learning programme includes Family English, Maths and Language and Wider Family Learning. These targeted programmes aim to improve the literacy and numeracy outcomes for children and to increase the literacy and numeracy skills of parents not in employment or with low skills and the least likely to access education with the intention to build more successful families and communities. Employability skills and next steps guidance are embedded in these accredited courses.

3.84 Targeted employment support services supported 10,000 plus local residents in 2019/20, of which 19% had a child under 16 years of age and 10% were lone parents. Over 5,400 residents were successfully supported to secure employment with around 300 businesses from across all sectors of the economy with 61% living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Ensuring that links are built between the pilot and the city's wider employment and skills infrastructure will enable the project participants to progress and sustain their success.

3.85 Over the last few months, project activity has included:

- A training programme to respond to local parents' needs over a twelve months period
- A new rewards scheme looking to reward parents at three stages of involvement in the programme
- Funding has been secured to link in with the scheme for access to training
- Additional links with the community centre are being developed to offer courses as they already deliver a substantial amount to adults in the area
- 3 celebration events organised per year where we will bring all parents and families together who have gained a reward within the particular period.

3.86 COVID-19 Response

3.87 Since 23rd March 2020 all group and training activities have ceased during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Childrens Centres are still in regular contact with families through food, milk activity box drops. A service audit in the first week of May found over 700 families identified by Children's Centre staff to have a level of vulnerability. For all of these families weekly, or more regular phone, facetime or email contacts are in place to maintain the relationships between staff and parents. We are exploring different media approaches to contact and training for example, an Infant Massage group has been run through the ZOOM platform.

3.88 Maintaining contact and ensuring families have food, support and feel safe in their homes is essential at this period. This will enable training, contact and groups to resume as and when it is safe to do so.

3.89 How outputs will be monitored

3.90 Outputs and impact will be assessed on:

- The number of parents involved in the programme over the period of the programme
- Distance travelled towards work readiness, measured through assessment and tracking frameworks
- Change in family circumstance, such as accessing training, volunteering or work

3.91 How outcomes will be monitored

3.92 These will be provided for November's report

3.93 Workstream 6: Best Start for Health & Wellbeing

We want every Leeds baby from conception to age two to have the best start in life, especially those who are the most vulnerable.

3.94 Overview of the activities that have taken place

- 3.95 We have a best start strategy because development in first 1000 days of life is of crucial importance
- 3.96 Within this workstream, the initiative aims to enhance early parenting capacity and increase breastfeeding and relationship building by making available evidence-based information. This initiative provides the information via the Baby Buddy app, and the Baby Express magazines for the digitally excluded. The project is being carried out by frontline services in Leeds and has a specific focus on young parents living in deprived circumstances.
- 3.97 The Baby Buddy app provides personalised information to parents to be and in the six months after the baby is born and is designed to provide stage appropriate knowledge, awareness and confidence. Locally it is being used regularly by practitioners to support their consultations and delivery of city wide PBB courses.
- 3.98 To ensure practitioners are up to date an extra workshop will be delivered in Spring 2020 by Best Beginnings for Baby Buddy Leads which will be cascaded to all practitioners. Learning from this will also be shared in the Best Beginnings practitioner forum.
- 3.99 Work continues in partnership with Best Beginnings to enhance the information available on the app. The workshop being delivered in Spring 2020 will also explore any additional local information that could be included. The app has a geolocation facility that enables parents to access local information, aiming to enhance communication and reduce isolation.

3.100 Perinatal Parenting Partnership (3P) Board

- 3.101 This board brings together partners offering perinatal education offer across the city, providing opportunities for learning, education and improved communication across the services. Antenatal and postnatal offer cards have been developed, it is hoped these will enable providers to better engage families in the range of programmes available from pregnancy to age two and increase take up.

3.102 COVID-19 Response

- 3.103 COVID-19 is undoubtedly exacerbating child poverty in Leeds and it is thus more important than ever to take action to mitigate the impact of poverty and provide every child with the best start in life. Services available to children and families have adapted quickly and many which provide support during the crucial 1000 days are now operating remotely and via digital means. Such services include Baby Steps, which provides antenatal education and support for vulnerable families, Breast Feeding Peer Support services, and Pregnancy in Mind, which works with women with mild to moderate anxiety and depression. Pregnant women are deemed a

vulnerable group in relation to COVID-19 and many women and families will be requiring additional support at this time. There are also plans for the Preparation for Birth and Beyond information and support to be provided in a digital format. The Baby Buddy app is also a vital tool, particularly at this time, and the content has been updated to include information on COVID-19. This is being promoted by all services and practitioners and downloads are up by approximately 15% at time of writing. The Perinatal Parenting Programmes Network has been utilised to share relevant COVID-19 information: including services changes, emergency food provision, reliable sources of information (i.e. RCOG), tools and resources to use with pregnant women and families and any relevant campaigns at this time. The network also continues to act as a means by which practitioners and services can share best practice.

3.104 How outputs will be monitored

3.105 *Best Beginnings*

3.106 Quarterly reports provided by Best Beginnings will give information about who uses the Baby Buddy app, demographics and the most used features.

3.107 *Perinatal Parenting Partnership (3P) Board*

3.108 The development of antenatal and postnatal offer cards and the uptake of this will provide us with an overview of the reach and impact of perinatal education in the city.

3.109 How outcomes will be monitored

The use of case studies to better understand the impact for these focus areas is being explored and an update will be provided in November's report.

3.110 Summary

3.111 This report has provided an overview of the work for each of the Impact Workstreams, detailed the response to COVID-19, and outlined the structure of the proposed outputs and outcomes to be incorporated within the work. It provides a baseline structure for the annual and interim reports and will shape updates moving forward.

3.112 It is important to note that some work will be undertaken not because it has substantive statistical impacts on outcomes of young people, but because it is the right thing to do for children living in poverty in Leeds. For example, the Healthy Holidays scheme will continue, even if it cannot demonstrate an impact on educational outcomes, because it is morally wrong that children are hungry during school holidays. We want to ensure that the systems that families are accessing are as kind, supportive and responsive as possible. We want to ensure that young people do not feel the individualised shame that is a common consequence of experiencing poverty in this country, and that families know where to go to for advice, support and guidance that is provided in a non-stigmatising or blaming approach. Poverty is a consequence of a failing political context, and we do not want our young people to carry the burden of national mistakes.

4 Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

4.1.1 Extensive consultation has been carried out with regards to this strategy, with private, public, third and education sectors, children, young people and parents, universities and community groups.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

4.2.1 Equality and diversity issues have been considered throughout this work (EDCI Screening Form attached at Appendix 2). Disadvantaged pupils are not a single group; characteristics such as Special Education Need and Disability (SEND), ethnicity and EAL (English as an Additional Language) interact with disadvantage with varying impacts on progress rates, gaps with non-disadvantaged pupils and the long term impact of disadvantage.

4.2.2 Equality Improvement Priorities have been developed to ensure our legal duties are met under the Equality Act 2010. The priorities will help the council to achieve its ambition to be the best city in the UK and ensure that as a city work takes place to reduce disadvantage, discrimination and inequalities of opportunity.

4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

4.3.1 This report provides information on poverty, which is a key city regional and national challenge. This priority is reflected in all city strategies contributing to the strong economy compassionate city including the Best Council Plan 2018/19-2020/21, the Inclusive Growth Strategy, the Joint Health and Well Being Plan and the Tackling Poverty and Inequality Executive Board report, discussed in December 2018.

4.3.2 Equality Improvement Priorities 2016 – 2020 have been developed to ensure that the council meets its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 by helping the council to identify work and activities that reduce disadvantage, discrimination and inequalities of opportunity.

4.3.3 The work fulfils some of the best council objectives and priorities as defined in the Best Council Plan 2018/19-2020/21. These include; improving educational achievement gaps; providing skills programmes and employment support; improving school attendance and reducing the percentage of young people who are NEET.

4.3.4 The strategy aligns with local and city wide strategies such as the Priority Neighbourhoods work, the Children and Young People's Plan, Child Friendly Leeds, Future in Mind Strategy, and the Best City for Learning

Climate Emergency

4.3.5 As the climate continues to change, extreme weather patterns across the globe will become increasingly common. The knock on effects of these changes will be profound, however it is hard to determine what specifically they will look like. What

is certain is that there will be scarcity of various resources, such as food and energy, which could lead to a price increase, which will have a disproportionate impact on people who live in poverty. We should seek to mitigate the impact of poverty and reduce insecurity and inequality around these basic needs to build strengthened communities for the future.

4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money

4.4.1 This report provides an update on existing services provided by the Council, schools and other partners and details how these have adapted in response to COVID-19, for example through remote delivery and signposting. Any costs to the Council due to COVID-19 will be fed through to the financial reporting associated with this. This report does not introduce new areas of strategy, however should a need for this be identified in future this will take into account current financial pressures and the need for savings to be identified across the Council. Where possible, a partnership approach would continue to be implemented, to pool resources from a variety of directorates and sectors across Leeds.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

4.5.1 This report is subject to call-in.

4.6 Risk management

4.6.1 None

5 Conclusions

5.1 Experiencing poverty has a significant correlation to poorer outcomes across a wide range of life indicators. This is a problem that is growing, both in Leeds and nationally, and it is clear that a radical approach is needed to reduce the impact of poverty.

5.2 In Leeds, we believe that a young person's life chances should not be impacted by their background or the area in which they live. We want to ensure that poverty presents no barriers for our children and young people, and we want all people to have access to the same opportunities, regardless of their background. We believe that all children and young people should have the freedom to choose their pathway, and that we can work together as a city to tackle any limitations that poverty may place on these pathways

5.3 We also know the challenges that are faced, both by the people who live in poverty, and by the services who work across the city. We need to focus on mitigating the impact of poverty on children and young people- whilst we work as a city to improve the structures around people who experience, or are at risk of, poverty.

5.4 For this reason, we need to work as a city, to share our understandings, knowledge and practice, to learn about the day to day impact of poverty for children and young people- and then to work with children and young people to tackle this impact.

6 Recommendations

6.1 That Executive Board note the strategic framework in place to tackle child poverty, and the work being undertaken by the council and its partners in the key areas of activity.

6.2 Note the current work and reporting updates outlined in the report.

6.3 Note the officer responsible for implementation is the Chief Officer, Partnerships & Health by December 2022.

6.4 That Executive Board have an understanding of the potential impact of COVID-19 on child poverty, and note the calls for a national approach to mitigating the impact of child poverty.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.