

Report of the Director of Children and Families

Report to Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)

Date: 3rd February 2021

Subject: Update on *Thriving, the Leeds Child Poverty Strategy*



Are specific electoral wards affected?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	
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 type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, access to information procedure rule number:	
Appendix number:	

Summary

1. Main issues

- This report will provide brief overview of *Thriving, the Leeds Child Poverty Strategy* and the various workstreams that sit underneath the strategy. It will also detail our immediate responses to the pandemic and ongoing work, impact and next steps.
- More details on each of the workstreams will be given to the scrutiny board verbally.
- It is well understood from research that poverty has very serious effects on children as they grow. In Leeds, latest local data for 2018/19 revealed 23% of children under 16 (34,862) in Leeds lived in poverty (before housing costs are deducted from income (DWP/ HMRC, 2020) which is an increase of 3% since 2016. This compares to the national figure where 18% of children under 16 lived in poverty (before housing costs are deducted from income.
- Given all that is known about the adverse effects poverty has on children, it is imperative and indeed our moral duty to do all that we can as a city to address these issues to mitigate these negative effects.

Impact of the Covid pandemic

- Over the next few years, we will start to see statistics that show the extent of poverty across the UK, and how this has been exacerbated by the covid pandemic.

Early indications appear to show that those who were previously experiencing poverty have been pushed deeper into poverty, and those who were previously living above the poverty line have been pushed into poverty. The pandemic has worsened existing inequalities, with vulnerable children facing severe and long term impacts.

- The Children’s Commissioner has estimated that, as a direct result of the pandemic, 300,000 additional children have been pushed into poverty nationally. She has written that COVID-19 has exposed and amplified the existing inequalities which face children “*Those children already facing the worst life chances have felt the greatest burden from the virus and our response to it... Unless we act now, Covid-19 will become an inter-generational crisis, with the impact of the economic fall-out on parents determining the future prospects of their children*”¹

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 has an individual resource implication. Where possible, a partnership approach has been implemented, to pool resources from a variety of directorates and sectors across Leeds.

4. **Recommendations**

That the Scrutiny Board notes the strategic framework in place to mitigate the impact of child poverty, and the work being undertaken by the council and other partners in the key areas of activity.

¹ [Children’s Commissioner, 2020](#)

1. Purpose of this report

1.1 To provide a brief overview of *Thriving: The Child Poverty Strategy for Leeds*, and the work that sits underneath the strategy. It also gives an update on some key personnel changes that have taken place in the past three months.

1.2 Recent changes:

A number of senior officers who led this agenda left the Local Authority in November 2020 at extremely short notice. They were:

- Sue Rumbold - Chief Officer, partnerships and health Children and Families
- Sue Wynne – Chief officer Employment and Skills
- Andrea Richardson – Head of Service Children and Families
- Paul Reddiex – Head of Service Early Help

Thriving: the Child Poverty Strategy will be now led at an officer level by Julie Longworth, Deputy Director, Children and Family Services and Andy Lloyd Head of Service for Workforce Development and Change. Work is currently underway to agree new leads for workstreams that were previously led by officers who have now left the council.

2. Background information

2.1 In 2016, Children & Families started to develop a plan around mitigating the impact of child poverty across Leeds. In 2017/ 2018, a scrutiny inquiry on child poverty recommended that Children & Families integrated more of a central focus on child poverty. The first Child Poverty Impact Board met in 2018, and *Thriving: The Child Poverty Strategy* for Leeds was launched in 2019.

The *Thriving* board has 6 workstreams:

1. Readiness for learning and school aged education
2. Housing and provision
3. Empowering families and safeguarding
4. Financial health and inclusion
5. Transitions and employment
6. Best start for health and wellbeing

2.2 We know that the feeling of being in poverty, the feeling of being excluded and the feeling of being ashamed can impact a child for the rest of their life. We don't want this in Leeds. So we are working together, as a city, to reduce the impact of poverty on young people. This is our moral imperative.

2.3 Our Ambitions

- We will be innovative, together, to break down the barriers that poverty creates.
- We will be brave, together, to revolutionise the way that Leeds works with children, young people & families who live in poverty.
- We will fight, together, to ensure that every child & young person who experiences poverty can thrive.

2.4 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 very serious impacts on children, the adults children become. Latest local data for 2018/19 revealed 23% of children under 16 (34,862) in Leeds lived in poverty

(before housing costs are deducted from income) which is an increase of 3% since 2016. This compares to the national figure where 18% of children under 16 lived in poverty (before housing costs are deducted from income).

2.5 The child poverty strategy has been co-created with children, young people, families with direct experience of poverty, third, private and public sector, schools, academics and other organisations.

2.6 Thriving has five fundamental principles:

- 1) All work needs to be informed by the knowledge of children, young people and parents/carers
- 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 and understandings that are used
- 5) Research is incorporated into every project

3.0 Main issues

This section provides a brief update on each impact workstream, the projects that sit within the impact workstreams and details responses to COVID-19, impact and next steps

3.1 Financial Health & Inclusion

The aim of this workstream is: ***We want every family to be equipped with the support, guidance and safety net needed to live financially secure and stable lives.***

The main projects are: Healthy Holidays, Free School Meals, Winter Grants Scheme, Staff training, Uniform Scheme, Digital Inclusion Gambling Related Harm

Update on recent activities and outputs

a) Healthy Holidays

- *Summer programme* - In Leeds, the summer DfE funded scheme was delivered across 30 third sector community groups, 14 school partnerships and 7 Council Community Hubs. 5,482 children and young people were reached over summer (DFE target of 5,000), with a total of 45,870 portions of food distributed. 70% of participating children and young people were eligible for Free School Meals.
- The delivery of the 2020/21 Healthy Holidays scheme has been adapted in line with COVID-19 requirements measures. For example activities were switched to online or activity packs that were delivered at the doorstep; and face to face activities were undertaken outside where possible, observing requirements for social distancing and numbers.
- The DfE has announced a new round of funding for Healthy Holidays and this workstream is developing our plans for that.

b) Free School Meals

- There has been an accelerated increase in the number of FSM claims since COVID-19. The number of FSM awards in March 2020 was 25,874 and by the beginning of May 2020 was 26,624, an increase of 750 in a two month period. In comparison, the increase in FSM awards from January to March 2020 was 610.
- The Health and Wellbeing team works closely with schools to encourage take-up.

- Where pupils are unable to attend school due to COVID-19 related absence, schools must work with their catering provider to provide a food parcel that meets the School Food Standards and will support a pupil with healthy lunches. Catering Leeds provide hampers for pupils entitled to means tested free school meals.

c) Winter Grants Scheme

- In November 2020, the government announced a COVID Winter Grant Scheme (CWGS). This package will enable Local Authorities to provide support to families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals from early December 2020 and covers the period until the end of March 2021.
- The CWGS allocated just over £2.8million to Leeds City Council to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy (heating, cooking and lighting), water bills (including sewerage) and other essentials.
- To date, £1.6 million of the funding has been approved to be allocated to for the provision of FSM to 34,862 children estimated to live in poverty in the city for the Christmas 2020 and February 2021 half-term holidays.

d) Uniform scheme -update on recent activities

- Leeds City Council and Leeds Community Foundation have funded Zero Waste Leeds (ZWL) to bring a co-ordinated uniform reuse scheme to the city. The aim of the scheme is to reduce the amount of uniforms sent to waste, reduce the stigma of wearing second hand clothing and tackling poverty through encouraging more families to reuse and donate rather than to feel pressured to buy new uniform every term
- The scheme has also been able to prevent the waste of a large donation of brand new uniform, totalling over 10,000 individual uniform items with a retail value of approximately £72,500. To date, 28 schools have ordered, received and distributed uniform donations to families in need, with a limited amount still available to order via school clusters.
- Further expansion for the project is currently being explored, particularly in regards to ways that the 'Making Second Hand the First Choice for Leeds' message can be translated to include other resources that children may need such as digital devices, stationery and backpacks

e) Gambling Related Harm

- The 2018/19 Leeds My Health, My School survey found that 24% of secondary aged pupils had taken part in gambling activity. In comparison, 13% had smoked a cigarette, 7% had tried illegal drugs and 51% had tried alcohol. Of the secondary aged pupils that had gambled; 65% did so with their parent/carer's knowledge.
- Building on this work, council officers from Children's Services, Public Health and the Financial Inclusion Team are working with Leeds Community Gambling Service and the Young Gamblers and Gamers Trust to develop over the next year a communications campaign and a training programme to raise awareness of the issue.
- Through working with the Voice, Influence and Change Team and the Leeds Safeguarding and Children Partnership, two focus groups and surveys of young people have been undertaken since October 2020 to inform this work.
- The results of this work are currently being analysed and processed and the results will inform the campaign and training packages developed in 2021.

f) Digital Inclusion

- It has been recognised that existing digital exclusion issues in the city for both children and adults have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Leeds City

Council and partners are looking at ways to tackle these issues through existing schemes such as Healthy Holidays and 100% Digital Leeds.

- Healthy Holidays 2020 supported digitally excluded children by purchasing and lending 97 iPads with data allowance to HH community hubs and schools, with support from 100% Digital Leeds. The scheme has also funded the Tech Angels initiative, managed by Solidaritech CIC as part of Digital Access West Yorkshire. They have a target of securing 200 donated laptops to refurbish and donate, with a data allowance, to children via Healthy Holidays community groups.
- The Council is also currently exploring further options for new initiatives which could provide digital devices for those in need. This will involve working with teams across departments, as well as alongside external partners such as Leeds Credit Union, Leeds Community Foundation and Zero Waste Leeds.

3.2 Best Start for Health & Wellbeing

The aim of this workstream is: ***We want every Leeds baby from conception to age two to have the best start in life, especially those who are the most vulnerable.***

The main projects are: Best Beginnings/Baby Buddy App and Perinatal Education

Update on recent activities and outputs

a) Best Beginnings/Baby Buddy App

- Best Beginnings have updated the content on the app in relation to COVID-19 and pregnancy. In Leeds there has been a further drive to direct women and families to the Baby Buddy app for support during the lockdown. Promotion of the app and its particular usefulness during this time has been achieved via local practitioner networks and social media communications at a city wide level.
- Public Health plan to explore further promotion of the app via a targeted social media campaign.

b) Perinatal Education

- The Baby Steps service works with vulnerable pregnant women and families and they have continued to provide antenatal and postnatal support during the pandemic. This support has been provided over the telephone and via digital means and where this has not been possible they have delivered physical resources to people's homes
- Face to face delivery of perinatal education programmes has clearly been impacted by COVID-19. The 0-19 PHINS have produced a digital PBB resource to support families and as of October 2020 are piloting delivery of virtual groups in three areas across the city via Microsoft Teams.
- The Baby Steps Service have received 189 referrals (Q1-Q3), have completed 130 home visits and 76 mums have attended 6 or more virtual sessions.
- It is planned to further roll out virtual antenatal parent education and support those who are digitally excluded to access such support.

3.3 Empowering Families & Safeguarding

The aim of this workstream is: ***We want to change the structure around social care to better support children, young people and families living in poverty.***

The main projects are: developing a framework for practitioners and connecting services

Update on recent activities and outputs

a) Framework for Practitioners

- The framework for practitioners has now been developed and has been expanded to include all children and families' practitioners and not just social workers. The content of the framework has been finalised and was launched on 4th December 2020 with a follow up month of poverty themed activities, webinars, resources and briefings on the theme of Poverty Awareness for Practitioners. In total we ran 11 events in the month of December with approximately 200 staff attending from Children and Families wider workforce as well as voluntary sector which included masterclasses, briefing sessions on social justice, universal credit, financial inclusion and Gambling. In addition we are providing the workforce with a toolkit of resources such as webinars and films to aid ongoing learning **and the offer will be embedded in our annual overall offer.**

b) Connecting services

- This part of the workstream has grown and developed more with a clear theme emerging of the strength of community and third sector engagement. After the launch of Poverty Awareness month in December our next steps will be to create more community based forums for third sector, community groups and Children and Families Services and the wider council to connect. Through the connections already built, there has been a clearer pathway to target need and distribute resources.
- Work has commenced to look at how we collate quantitative and qualitative data including identifying poverty as a factor at the point of first contact with Early Help or Social Work Service and gathering the lived experience of people using services to learn and better our offer. A questionnaire has been designed to seek feedback from users of services and to learn how to improve lived experiences and this will be translated to the 11 most common languages so we can begin to understand cultural different aspects poverty. We are exploring options for a reporting tool re quality and quantity of our support.
- We have recently been successful in a DFE innovation bid through partners in practice and this Leeds City Council project will distribute short term funding to the 22 Clusters which support schools, so they can invest in innovative approaches to providing practical support for families to mitigate family poverty, and to add to the delivery of services that will have a positive protective impact on families and communities during the pandemic. They will also support workers in Leeds to adapt to changed ways of working, utilising practice approaches developed by the Rethink Team to provide a high quality services to families. This funding amounts to £390,000 up to end of March 2021 and the money will be spent on additional mental health support, expanding an online positive parenting programme (Triple P), and additional outreach support for young people at risk, food support and a range of other services to support the impact of covid. Our 22 clusters directly received £200,000 in total and will also benefit from the city wide spending as detailed above.

3.4 Housing & Provision

The aim of this workstream is: ***We want every family to live in housing that is safe, appropriate and affordable.***

The main projects are: **Selective Licensing and Enhanced Income Service.**

Update on recent activities and outputs

a. Enhanced Income

- Between April 2020 and Dec 2020 the Housing Officer Income Team worked with 4385 households, securing just over £3million additional income in total for them. Of these households, 1385 were households with children, helping secure around £983,000 in additional income. The average amount secured for each household with children the team worked with is around £710.
- Moving forward we are determined to ensure that we continue to provide the best support possible to our tenants. We are exploring ways to mainstream our approach to UC within the service.

b. Selective Licensing Update

- This scheme will introduce licensing for all privately rented properties in 2 identified areas in Leeds, Harehills and Beeston. It is essentially a licence to ensure standards are met by Landlords which aims to improve housing conditions for residents in Leeds.
- Given the current situation with the pandemic it has not been possible to start and undertaken any proactive inspections, to cross the threshold of homes to address standards management and individual family needs as originally planned. This has been delayed due to the pandemic, and the delay in issuing licences following the suspension of requests for payment. Remote working also meant a different way of working had to be developed to meet IG concerns due to the need to remove confidential information from the office to continue to deliver the scheme. This has impacted on the planned number of proactive inspections we have been able to take in the areas and therefore the offer to support the sector and those living in their properties.
- Currently we are in the process of now starting to issue licences via the statutory process. Issuing these will take time but will allow us once issued and the pandemic makes it safe for all parties to do so to start proactive inspections in the areas.
- We are continuing to address conditions and needs of those living in the area where we are able from queries or referrals from partners. We have also continued to target those landlords and properties where we don't have a licence and take the appropriate action and support those residents living in such homes.

3.5 Employment & Transitions

The aim of this workstream is: ***We want every young person and family to have the relevant skills and experience to access and secure well paid employment.***

Update on recent activities and outputs

- At the end of October the number of employees furloughed in Leeds had reduced to 25,500 at a 6% take up rate compared to 16% in July.
- The Universal Credit (UC) claimant figures for November, published on 15 December, show the provisional count of people claiming UC (in and out-of-work) in Leeds was 71,548. This is an increase of 2,071 on the previous month and an increase of 98% since March
- All wards in Leeds have seen an increase in unemployment and an increased uptake of in and out-of-work benefits but there has been a disproportionate impact on our poorest communities. These are also the wards with the highest number of children living in low income families.

- The Employment and Skills service offers a wide range of targeted employment support programmes and employer-led sector specific interventions alongside the universal information, advice and guidance offer available from Jobshops in Community Hubs. Recruitment activity has continued to take place during the pandemic.
- A total of 2,701 people were supported into work by the service in period April – December 2020. Jobs were secured across all sectors with the largest numbers in health and care, food retail, logistics, distribution and transport, digital and technology
- Parents can access a range of employment support services and data collected across quarter 1 to quarter 3 (April to December 2020) recorded a total of 2,980 new customers accessing the services of which 19% had a child under 16 years of age and 7% were lone parent. This is lower than in the same period in the previous year.
- Employment and Skills support will remain a vital part of what we will be doing to aid recovery. This includes the continued efforts of the Leeds Inclusive Anchors Network and partners across the Employment and network to aid collaboration between partners from across sectors to provide support for priority groups and sectors impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

Partnership Activity

- In October The Leeds Economic Recovery Framework was developed and sets out an approach with the aim that would enable the Council and the city to adapt quickly during this uncertain period, whilst striving to build more resilience into Leeds' economy and continuing to deliver Inclusive Growth.

3.6 Readiness for Learning & School Aged Education

The aim of this workstream is: ***We want to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of children and young people who live in poverty.*** This has been incorporated into the *3As strategy* and *Leeds Year of Reading*. The main project underneath this project is Period Products.

Update on recent activities and outputs

Period Products

- In a project that has been co-produced with young people, Leeds has developed a period products scheme, within which free period products are being distributed in schools and community hubs. The aim of the scheme is to provide period products for all those who may find it difficult to access them, and to decrease the stigma around periods. The scheme is a result of a partnership with young people and parents, third, private, public sector organisations, schools and the University of Leeds.
- During the pandemic, products were instead distributed through the emergency food response, key third sector organisations and Catering Leeds. After the first lockdown, the scheme reverted to distributing products through schools and the open community hubs.
- Since October 2019 52,000 packs of products have been distributed in Leeds across schools and community hubs and interest and demand continues to be consistently demonstrating a need across the city.
- Qualitative feedback on the impact of the scheme is planned to be gathered, however the pandemic has delayed this piece of work.

3.7 Tackling poverty and inequality

This is an area of work that sits above the impact workstreams, and is fundamental to the work of the board and all of the projects.

Update on recent activities and outputs

- In March 2020 Leeds City Council started outreach, engagement and communication with residents who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. This work was able to commence rapidly due to the existing partnerships that already existed in the City. Task groups have been established to identify strong, clear, evidence based COVID-19 messages and key messages are tailored and communicated using a variety of formats - infographics, BSL, easy read formats, audio, video, street signage, social media, community radio stations. Translated messages have also been produced in the top 12 languages used in the City.
- The Communities of Interest network was established to ensure information and support connects with the most marginalised and vulnerable communities in Leeds. The network brings together representatives from diverse communities from across Leeds.
- The Leeds Outbreak Plan has identified specific work and resources for the Third Sector through the Communities of Interest Network. This builds on existing capacity and capability of the Third Sector to take a proactive, preventative and asset based approach to prevent and manage outbreaks in local communities and communities of interest.
- Work continues in the City to understand the differential and disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on inequality.

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. 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. 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 has no specific legal implications.

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 partnership 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. This is a moral imperative.
- 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 continue 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 the Scrutiny Board notes the strategic framework in place to mitigate the impact of child poverty, and the work being undertaken by the council and other partners in the key areas of activity.

7 Background documents²

- 7.1 None

² 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.