

CHILD POVERTY REVIEW GROUP

15th October, 2013

PRESENT – Councillor Lister (Chair), Councillors Crudass, L. Hughes, Kelley, C. Taylor; and Emma Coltman (Community Representative).

OFFICERS – Josh Slack, Performance Officer and Debbie Spence,

APOLOGIES – Councillor L. Vasey and Mr. T. Fisher.

PURPOSE OF MEETING – Following on from the first meeting held 15th April, 2013, Members requested to examine further the ‘living wage’ and in –work poverty; and Welfare Reform.

1. Living Wage Discussion Paper – Josh Slack circulated to Members a discussion paper to outline what the living wage is and the wage levels nationally compared to locally.

The living wage is classed as a minimum wage level needed to meet basic needs. The current living wage for the UK is set by the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) at Loughborough University and is set at £7.45 per hour. There is a separate living wage set for London to reflect the added costs of living and this is set by the Greater London Authority at £8.55 per hour.

There are clear regional differences with regard to the cost of living across the country.

The living wage is calculated by using the Joshua Rowntree Foundation Minimum Income Standard (MIS) research, produced by the CRSP, based on detailed research with members of the public to identify which items need to be included in a minimum household budget. The report is updated each year to measure inflation and research conducted every 2 years to ensure that the basket of goods and services is up to date.

The Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) data is used to look at regional variance in expenditure to then estimate what the living wage could be for each area. The LCF includes expenditure on:

- Food and non-alcoholic drinks;
- Alcoholic drinks, tobacco and narcotics;
- Clothing and footwear;
- Housing, fuel and power;
- Household goods and services;

- Health;
- Transport;
- Communication;
- Recreation and culture;
- Education; and
- Restaurants and hotels.

In 2011 the average weekly expenditure for the North East was £384.20 which is lower than the figure for the UK of £470.70 (18% less than the UK).

If 18% reduction in household expenditure is applied to the living wage for the UK, it would leave a wage of £6.11 per hour, which is £0.08 per hour below the current minimum wage, £1.34 below the current UK living wage, and £2.44 below the living wage for London.

Although the LCF shows that weekly expenditure is 18% lower in the North East than the UK, this does not necessarily mean that the cost of living is 18% lower within the North East.

Further information was circulated at the meeting from Citizens UK, Living Wage: A Guide for Employers.

2. Poverty Project – Josh Slack circulated to Members a copy of the Darlington Partnership's report 'The Scope of Poverty in Darlington' dated November, 2013. In response to a letter from Tim Grant, Principal of Darlington College, Darlington Partnership established an enquiry group to look at the issue of poverty within Darlington. The group had two clear objectives :

- Assess the current scale of the problem within Darlington; and
- Review the interventions currently available across the Borough.

The group was led by Tim Grant with support from the Partnership Director and included involvement from groups such as Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau; Public Health; the North East Chamber of Commerce; and Darlington Credit Union.

Members discussed the percentage and number of children living in poverty in Darlington by Ward in 2011. Analysis of research commissioned by the Guardian newspaper, and undertaken by Experian showed that in Darlington there were almost 6,000 households on the verge of poverty, roughly 13% of all households in Darlington.

Members also discussed the information in the report relating to the numbers of children in Darlington who were not claiming free school meals, despite being entitled to. In addition to missing out on free school meals, the schools themselves

are also missing out on the pupil premium, which is worth £900 per pupil eligible for free school meals, to improve their attainment.

Members discussed how eligibility checks are carried out to ensure that free school meals are being accessed and agreed that further communication exercises within schools and the Schools Forum, to promote the uptake of school meals, was required.

Discussion also ensued on what happens to excess food in schools and whether the food is donated to food banks.

Reference was also made to the Institute for Local Governance and Children North East project "Poverty Proofing the School Day".

Josh also referred to a consultation exercise with various organisations he was undertaking to gauge the problems associated with poverty and requested Members experiences. Recommendations following the consultation will then be forwarded to Darlington Partnership.

3. Welfare Reform Update – Josh Slack update Members on the Welfare Reform and the workstreams that have been devised by Darlington Borough Council and Darlington Partnership as follows:

- Development of an observatory – central collection of data for the Citizen Advice Bureau, Credit Union and Council Services.
- Resource Pack – updated resource pack now on the Council's and Partnership Board websites.
- Directory of Support – production of a directory of support that can be located at GP Surgeries and CAB. A matrix of responses is currently being produced.
- Development of an on-line booking system for organisations i.e. CAB, Welfare Rights/ Revenue and Benefits.
- Digital volunteers to support people with computer literacy.

It was also reported that the Government are due to publish a revised Child Poverty Strategy for 2014 and the Council may look to revise their Strategy at that time.

Action : Allison Hill to e-mail all Members for details of any experiences they have in dealing with child poverty within their wards and forward to Josh Slack by 1st November, 201 to include in the consultation exercise referred to above.