

CHILD POVERTY REVIEW GROUP

15th April, 2013

PRESENT – Councillors Lister, L. Hughes and Richmond.

OFFICERS – Jenni Cooke, Assistant Director Children, Families and Learning; Josh Slack, Performance Officer and Julian Kenshole, Head of Strategy and Improvement.

PURPOSE OF MEETING – This was the first meeting of the Review Group and the purpose of the meeting was to receive a presentation on the North East Child Poverty Commission Report: Local Authorities, Local Duties and Local Action.

DISCUSSION:

- Members received a presentation from Stephen Crossley, the Regional Child Poverty Action Plan Coordinator, Institute for Local Governance, Durham University who reported on the main findings and recommendations in the report.
- Members also discussed in more detail the recommendation on child poverty proofing plans and strategies and how other local authorities have approached this.
- The presentation gave some background to Child Poverty Act which received Royal Assent on 25th March, 2010 and the requirements contained therein on local authorities and their partner authorities to reduce and mitigate the effects of child poverty in their local areas.
- Julian Kenshole reminded Members that this Scrutiny Committee received a report on the authority's Child Poverty Strategy at the meeting on 7th January, 2013
- Part 1 of the presentation outlined what was in the report and examines some of the priorities identified by the 12 Local Authorities in the North East that provided information for the report and also looked at what authorities were currently doing. The presentation also included a number of various quotes from the authorities Child Poverty Strategies.
- The presentation highlighted the importance of raising aspirations and not just education priorities. "Transforming the aspirations and ambitions of children growing up in poverty and their families is essential if we are to tackle child poverty".

- The presentation also highlighted the importance of reducing worklessness and to dispel the myth that in deprived areas of the country no one has the desire to work. In fact 61 per cent of children growing up in poverty live in a household where at least one adult works and one of the strongest single findings of the study is that interviewees trapped in low pay, no pay cycle over the years expressed great personal commitment to employment. Poor wages can also be one of the biggest causes of poverty.
- It was also recognised that there is an overall shortage of good jobs and employers were content to keep jobs low skill and found difficulty in filling vacancies.
- The presentation examined early intervention and ways of ensuring that children that live in poverty are safe and also maximising household income and helping families by the provision of high quality, accessible information advice and guidance.
- Part 2 of the presentation outlined what was not in the report and examines some of the issues which could have been included in local authority documents and which offer opportunities for alternative forms of action.
- Suggested areas for 'poverty proofing' a Child Poverty Strategy were also discussed which included living wage; commissioning and procurement; family friendly employment opportunities; Welfare reform; targeting or universal services; institutional 'language'; and participation or consultation.

IT WAS AGREED – That a further meeting be arranged for the Review Group to consider, taking into account the recommendations contained in the North East child Poverty Commission Report and to examine what this authority should be doing further. Areas for further discussion to include the 'living wage' and in-work poverty; social attitudes towards poverty and misconceptions; how to target young people and help maximise their potential; and welfare reforms.