

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – 17 MARCH 2015

CHILD POVERTY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Panel has been considering the question of child poverty over a number of meetings. At the Panel on 16 September 2014, it was agreed that a Task and Finish Group be established to review the current programmes being delivered in the New Forest which directly or indirectly aim to tackle child poverty.

1.2 The terms of reference were agreed as:

- Review current definitions of child poverty and determine what a workable approach is for the Council.
- Review the level of child poverty in the District itself; in relation to other Hampshire Districts and other comparators where appropriate.
- Consult with local organisations on the needs, as experienced across the District.
- Consider the implications of the data and evidence presented, for the delivery of Services, whether by the Council (directly or indirectly) or by other agencies where the Council may wish to influence delivery.
- Having undertaken the above activities, to produce a report of findings to include such recommendations as are felt appropriate to effect beneficial change in service delivery.

1.3 This report is a briefing note on the work of the Task and Finish Group.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Reducing child poverty has been a Government target for many years. The Child Poverty Act 2010 tasked local areas to produce a child poverty needs assessment. Hampshire County Council undertook such an assessment in 2011. The data found within the assessment showed that the New Forest District had significant levels of child poverty in locations across the District.

2.2 Reviewing this and other information, the Task and Finish Group was fully supportive of fulfilling the terms of reference. The Group set about meeting what was felt to be a challenging timescale, given the nature and scale of the subject.

3. THE WORK OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

3.1 The membership of the Task and Finish Group was as follows:

Cllr Alan O'Sullivan (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs Andrews
Cllr Steve Clarke
Cllr Mrs McLean

3.2 The Group has met on three occasions. The first meeting of the Group established that high levels of child poverty existed at locations across the District. It was recognised that, given the complexity and extent of the subject, the Group would have limited scope to fully examine the extent of child poverty in the time available. However there was still likely to be value in pressing ahead.

3.3 At the second meeting, the Group held a workshop session inviting representatives from key organisations within the District. The workshop was divided into four key themes as framework for discussion, these were: -

- Nutrition and health
- Rural communities including travellers/gypsy families
- Managing income including debt advice and signposting/methods of communication
- Mental Health in young people

14 representatives attended and constructive discussions were held on all of the themes.

3.4 The final meeting was used to review the findings of that session, to enable the Group present their suggestions to the Panel for consideration. Having worked through this process, the Panel believes that it has been worthwhile and useful groundwork has been achieved. The feedback from those invited to attend has also been positive.

4. OUTCOMES OF THE WORKSHOP HELD ON 6 FEBRUARY 2015

4.1 It was clear from the discussion across the topics that there were some prevailing themes – better information sharing, working on partnerships/relationships, targeting services appropriately and understanding needs in specific communities, such as the Gypsy; Roma; Traveller, community.

4.2 As a direct result of the work undertaken in the workshop session with key partners, the Group have developed a list of actions as set out in Appendix 1 to this report and recommends their adoption for consideration by the relevant Portfolio Holders.

4.3 The Chairman and members of the Task & Finish Group wish to thank all those who took part in the workshop session held on 6 February. The findings of the workshop have been shared with the attendees. The Group felt that the workshop was a valuable way of sharing information with key partners and provided a useful forum for networking. As such the Group would recommend that the Council hosts similar sessions in the future.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 That the Panel approves the actions set out in Appendix 1 and recommends their presentation to the relevant Portfolio Holders for consideration; and

5.2 That the Task & Finish Group be reconvened after the May elections to investigate this subject further through the suggested items in Appendix 2.

For further information please contact:

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Background Papers:

None.

TABLE 1: ACTIONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

ITEM	REASON	HOW	PORTFOLIO
Improvements to information availability and distribution across all the subjects covered in the workshop	Information is a core resource and whilst there is material out there, it is not well co-ordinated or presented.	Build on the work of the New Forest Advisory Service; Local Children's Partnership and others and connect to NFDC sources. Better use of mobile technology/ social media.	Finance and Efficiency; Health and Leisure; Housing and Communities
Enable front line staff to identify those in need and signpost.	Service staff meet with those in need and can be in a position to know where assistance can be found.	There will be a need to develop awareness / skills and ready access to information. Will apply to all relevant services and is likely to tie into safeguarding and "Prevent" training. Adapt the older persons 'trigger tool' as an additional guide to staff in assessing those in need. Test staff knowledge through a 'mystery' shopper.	All with front line services
NFDC employee and Members to be more aware of the cultures of the GRT community and how services might best be made accessible so as to ensure the best life chances for all children	Difficulty in matching needs and services effectively. Changing arrangements amongst service providers (statutory and voluntary)	Start with training – perhaps related to the induction programme in the coming year. Could then lead to consideration of addressing service delivery and awareness in the wider community. Ensure that there is an officer within the Council with specialist knowledge of this Group and filter this knowledge to other officers. Ensure one point of contact.	All Portfolios
NFDC employees to be more approachable and more knowledgeable	Perceptions of the Council can be a barrier to people using services and getting what they need. Employee understanding of the mental health impacts	Consider training of front line staff in customer skills and also specifics such as budget advice. More use of social media. Provide our customers with	All Portfolios

	of lack of access to finance and/or housing	service feedback forms. Provide staff and members with training on mental health.	
Develop a sustainable programme of 'Community Food Initiatives' to teach hard to reach groups that are living in poverty, socially isolated or have longer term health issues how to cook healthy food on a budget'	Making the most of existing groups / knowledge and workings. Avoiding duplication.	Enable awareness – officers linking up; supporting the operation of groups, possible higher profile for partnership section of NFDC web site. Provide a directory of voluntary organisations/key providers working within this subject on website. Host a yearly networking seminar similar to the workshop held on the 6 Feb.	All Portfolios
Mapping and understanding of mental health commissioning and service delivery for children and adults, particularly those with physical disabilities and special needs.	There was a lack of such mapping with may be hindering identification of need/take up and leading to the danger of duplication	Take this matter to the New Forest Health and Well Being Partnership Board	Health and Leisure
Provide more welfare surgeries	There is a need for more access to what can be complex information	Informal (tea and biscuits) approach Make more use of community premises such as children centres.	Finance and Efficiency
Enable a relationship between HCC GRT team and New Forest GRT with permanent residence	This link was not made currently	Enable a link	Housing and Communities
Direct referral to food banks.	As a direct result of networking at the workshop on 6 February, Housing Officers now have contact details of those running food banks in the district and can now refer people to these.	Ensure that Housing Officers continue to be aware of contacts details of those running food banks in the District.	Housing and Communities

Free use of room hire in NFDC offices	Venues can cost third parties for interviews. This is likely to be at low or no cost to NFDC	Room hire function.	Finance and Efficiency
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POSSIBLE LINES OF ENQUIRY FOR FUTURE COMMUNITY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL MEETINGS

ITEM	REASON	HOW
Receive a report on Public Health Hampshire work with GRT community.	Health needs of this group are still apparent and there may be particular actions to consider. Current work is being completed and will be up to date.	Presentation to Panel
Community transport – what is commissioned and how / /what is out there – joining up of need and provision.	Public transport is understood to be largely a matter of central government and County Council action. Local action / commissioning of community transport services may offer more scope. There is some uncertainty as to how well community users and needs are connected to transport provision and commissioning.	Possible joint Task and Finish Group between Panels
Should NFDC funding of third parties make more overt requirements to demonstrate recognition of child poverty?	Demands are rising, resources are falling, so there is a need to make best use of what is available.	Panel considers if Portfolios should be asked to consider at all; generally or more specifically