

Open Report on behalf of the Director of Children's Services

Report to:	Executive
Date:	01 May 2012
Subject:	Child Poverty Strategy and Action Plan
Decision Reference:	01982
Key decision?	No

Summary:

Following the recent consultation regarding the Lincolnshire Child Poverty Strategy "Improving life chances and economic prosperity through raised aspirations", responses from key stakeholders and parents living in target areas were collated and analysed. Those responses that related to the approach to tackling child poverty have been incorporated into the strategy itself as far as possible; many responses related to action and so will be covered by strategic aims and objectives in the Child Poverty Action Plan.

Recommendation(s):

The purpose of this report is to ask the Executive to approve the Child Poverty Strategy for publication and to endorse the Draft Child Poverty Action Plan and draft Child Poverty Scorecard, which would be used to negotiate key performance measures with statutory partners and to monitor progress via the Children and Young Peoples Partnership (C&YPSP).

Alternatives Considered:

1. Not to approve the Child Poverty Strategy

Reasons for Recommendation:

The Child Poverty Act 2010 requires the Lead Authority, in partnership with key stakeholders, to carry out a needs assessment and develop a strategy to tackling child poverty in the area. The initial draft strategy document "Improving life chances and economic prosperity through raised aspirations - Lincolnshire's approach to tackling child poverty" was written following a comprehensive needs assessment and the development of an evidence base; the re-draft of the strategy document follows a period of consultation from 1st december 2011 to 31st January 2012, which included statutory partners, key stakeholders and parents. This latest document, if approved, will be published and acknowledged as the foundation for the Child Poverty Action Plan and Scorecard for monitoring and measuring progress in tackling child poverty in the County.

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1. Background

The Child Poverty Act received Royal Assent on 25th March 2010, at which point the national definition of child poverty was based on National Performance Indicator NI 116: The proportion of children living in poverty. At that time, the measure for child poverty was families with dependent children where the household income was less than sixty percent of the national equivalized median; this equated to around £347 per week for a couple with two children.

More recent data produced at national level places more emphasis on the number of children age 0 - 15 living in households where at least one parent is in receipt of out of work benefits, whereas NI 116 includes families with children age 0 – 19 that are either in receipt of out of work benefits or tax credits as a result of low pay. Both datasets are still available.

A major concern regarding deprivation and poverty is the effect on children's health and development, for example, poor heating can affect the development of the brain in infants as the body's energy is channelled into trying to keep warm. This can affect the development of neural networks, leading to poor cognitive development, which ultimately impacts on education attainment. In many cases, this lack of early development has lifelong implications for attainment and the employment options.

A comprehensive needs assessment carried out in 2011 using the most recent NI 116 data available at the time (2008) suggested that the rate of poverty in Lincolnshire at 16.5% was lower than national levels (20.9%) and also lower than some of our statistical neighbours, i.e. Derbyshire (16.0%), Norfolk (17.5%), Nottinghamshire (16.8%). However, it also revealed areas of the County where the proportion of children living in poverty was high, for example Fenside ward in Boston (40.7%) and Ingoldmells ward in East Lindsey (40.3%).

Further analysis showed the following:

- while the wards of Fenside and Ingoldmells had the highest proportions of children living in poverty, there was a considerable different in the actual numbers, i.e. Fenside (510), Ingoldmells (130)
- some wards in Lincolnshire registered lower proportions of children living in poverty but much higher numbers, e.g. Earlesfield in South Kesteven (37.0% but 810 children) and Glebe in Lincoln (34.2% but 715 children)
- 25% of children living in poverty in the County lived in 30 of 413 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs); these are micro areas within wards with populations between 1000 and 3000 residents.
- In one LSOA in the Birchwood ward in Lincoln, 50.8% of children were living in poverty (335 children).

This highlighted the fact that percentages alone would not be a reliable measure of the situation across the County but that numbers also needed to be considered.

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Data published since 2008 has shown that the 15 wards with the highest number of children living in poverty have remained constant for a number of years, irrespective of the measure used.

The Strategy has been developed as a result of the findings of the needs assessment and emphasizes the need to have a targeted approach to tackling child poverty.

Other data analysed during the needs assessment included levels of unemployment and type of benefit claimed, levels of achievement including Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Key Stage 4, level of qualification held by adults of working age and levels of priority debt in some areas. This showed the following:

- There is a statistical correlation between wards where there is a high proportion of children living in poverty and those where achievement in the EYFS assessments and at Key Stage 4 is poor
- Performance declines over time in areas where children are living in families of low socioeconomic position
- Families in areas where there are high numbers of children living in poverty are also more likely to have high levels of priority debt (i.e. where they are at risk of losing life essentials, such as liberty, housing and heating).

The research carried out for the needs assessment included surveys with some parents that live in areas where numbers of children living in poverty are high. Responses from this work showed that:

- lack of affordable childcare is a barrier to finding employment
- lack of availability and the cost of transport severely limits options open to individuals in relation to learning and employment
- parents would welcome support with financial management, particularly advice on budgeting
- in some cases living arrangements were impacting on:
 - children's educational achievement, i.e. where there was lack of a warm, quiet space to do homework, or where children were forced to share a bedroom with an autistic sibling that disrupted sleep which then affected school attendance
 - family health, where the choice was paying for either food or heating
 - parents' mental health

Overall, the needs assessment highlighted that tackling economic poverty alone would not be sufficient to improve the life chances of children, young people and their parents, but that poverty of access and aspiration would also need to be addressed. The strategy is, therefore, built around these themes with the overarching requirement that if resources are to be used to best effect, they must be targeted at those areas and towards those groups with the greatest need.

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In the current economic climate with ever increasing demands on limited resources, this also means that multi agency working and avoiding duplication of effort will be key to making progress in reducing child poverty and improving life chances.

2. Conclusion

The recommendation is that the Executive:

- endorses the Child Poverty Strategy as Lincolnshire's approach to tackling child poverty in the County and approves it for publication
- endorses the draft Action Plan as the framework to be used with strategic partners and other stakeholders to negotiate key performance indicators against which progress can be monitored

3. Legal Comments:

4. Resource Comments:

5. Consultation

a) Has Local Member Been Consulted?

n/a

b) Has Executive Councillor Been Consulted?

Yes

c) Scrutiny Comments

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee will consider this report at its meeting on 20th April 2012. Comments from this meeting will be presented to the Executive on 1st May 2012.

d) Policy Proofing Actions Required

n/a

6. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report

Appendix A	Child Poverty Strategy
Appendix B	Draft Child Poverty Action Plan

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7. Background Papers

The following background papers as defined in the Local Government Act 1972 were relied upon in the writing of this report.

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
Child Poverty Needs Assessment Part 1: Evidence Base	Lincolnshire Research Observatory

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