

Evidence Paper: Poverty in Poole I

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Purpose of this Paper

To provide an update on the nature and extent of poverty and the actions the Council is taking to reduce poverty in Poole.

Quality of life and equality of opportunity

The Council's stated purpose is to improve the quality of life for the people of Poole. We know that Poole is a relatively prosperous place with a healthy population. However evidence shows that not all people have the same equality of opportunity to benefit from living here. In some parts of Poole Children are less likely to achieve and more likely to require additional local authority services. These same areas also contain a greater proportion of households who require welfare support to maintain a basic standard of living. Finally, male life expectancy is 8.1 years less if you live in the poorest areas of Poole compared to the more affluent areas. The corresponding difference for female life expectancy is 5.0 years.

What is poverty?

The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) use a relative definition of poverty. Defined as the number of people living below a poverty line which is set at 50 percent (half) the median (average) income in a given country. The UK Government takes a similar approach to the OECD but instead sets the poverty line at 60 percent of median household income, in 2011/12 it was £220 per week¹.

However poverty is not just a lack of income, it can also be about lack of or reduced level of citizenship. That is, people also live in poverty if they are deprived of the conditions of life - diet, amenities, services and activities which are taken for granted by the rest of society. For example, people living in inadequate housing or those with chronic health problems are likely to expend most of their resources on coping with everyday life and so will be less able to participate fully as citizens. Furthermore, this situation is likely to be self perpetuating since lack of choice and lack of control over their lives are likely to lead to apathy and low expectations. Of those registered to vote, those in poorer wards are less likely to turn out in local elections. Turnout in the last local elections was highest in Broadstone (56.4%) and lowest in Alderney and Newtown (34.4% and 34.2%, respectively).

A widely used definition of poverty is one proposed by Pete Townsend.²

"Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the community in which they belong. Their resources are so seriously

¹ Department of Work and Pensions, Households below average income 1994/95 to 2011/12. The figure quoted is after housing cost.

² Pete Townsend, 'Poverty in the UK', Penguin. 1979

below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are in effect excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities. Thus poverty is powerlessness, inequality, exclusion, discrimination, injustice, indignity, and not receiving the courtesy due to every member of the community”.

Or from Jean, a Church Action on Poverty member;

"Poverty is worrying where the next meal is coming from, what bill you're going to miss to buy the kids shoes. You try to put money away, but something always comes up...."

Finally, we should consider community poverty. Poor people often live in neighbourhoods where shops and services are few and expensive, and buses run infrequently and unreliably. The lack of cash to support local businesses and services may lead to a negative spiral that creates an impoverished environment and economy.

Which groups are most likely to be effected?

The Child Poverty Action Group reported that in 2009/10³:

- 53 per cent of those living below the poverty line had children
- lone parent families were almost twice as likely to live in poverty than two parent families
- families with at least one disabled member were 30 per cent more likely to live in poverty than families without disabilities
- people from ethnic minorities were 64 per cent more likely to live in poverty than average (this figure varies by ethnic group)
- families with one or more workless parent were seven times more likely to live below the poverty line than those where both parents had jobs.

What is being done in Poole?

The Council along with partners in the public and voluntary sectors are taking action on poverty across five major areas; Child Poverty; Welfare Reform; Supporting People to Obtain Employment; Supporting People with Low Income and Priority Places. These actions have been informed by research evidence published by the Council. Future research will develop the use of the Council's own management information to provide more frequent and closer monitoring of poverty and the impact of local initiatives to tackle poverty. In addition the Council and Bournemouth University are supporting a community led summit on poverty. The summit is scheduled for June this year details will be shared with Elected Members when available.

Child Poverty

Poole's Child Poverty Strategy 2011- 2014 was prepared with Poole's Children Trust⁴, its stated mission is that; *"Children and young people who live in poverty will be supported to maximise their life chances and to achieve their potential, through a programme of individual,*

³ Child Poverty Action Group, <http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/who-lives-poverty>. Accessed 26/02/2014.

⁴ [Reducing the Impact of Child Poverty in Poole 2011 to 2014](#).

family and community level action". Informed by the Child Poverty Needs Assessment⁵ the strategy tasks identified agencies including the Borough of Poole with specific actions that will support people to obtain skills and employment, maximise income and improve family and life chances.

One of the Borough of Poole actions within the Child Poverty Strategy is to support parent's return to work by maintaining sufficient childcare provision to meet the needs of families returning to employment. The Poole Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan 2011- 2014⁶ details progress against delivery of specific actions designed to ensure there is sufficient childcare of right type and quality to meet the needs of Poole residents. This includes the provision of funded childcare places. The priorities and action plan are informed by a comprehensive assessment of childcare supply and demand⁷.

Welfare Reforms

The Government want to make the benefit system fairer and more affordable to help reduce poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency. Universal Credit is central to the Government's Welfare Reform agenda; it is designed to both simplify the benefits system and improve work incentives by allowing individuals to keep more of their income as they move into work or increase their hours. The Government predict that more than half of affected households will have higher entitlement under Universal Credit⁸. Although it was originally intended to be introduced from April 2013, at the time of writing there is no published timetable for the introduction or for the migration of existing claimants to Universal Credit for Poole.

Other welfare reforms have progressed which have had a negative financial impact on people of working age and consequently on dependant children. These changes include the introduction of Local Council Tax Support, Benefit Cap, Changes to Local Housing Allowance and the reduction of Housing Benefit where there is an under occupation of bedrooms. People of Pension Credit Age and people with disabilities have been protected from some of these reforms. However the change from Incapacity Benefit to Employment Support Allowance which started in 2008 will negatively impact on some people who have poor physical and/or mental health.⁹

Supporting People to Obtain Employment

Welfare to Work Schemes

There are a number of nationally commissioned 'welfare to work' schemes operating in Poole which aim to help people who have been living on benefits to move into sustainable employment. These range from 'Get Britain Working' which is managed by Job Centre Plus, to the 'Work Programme' which is a 'payment by results' programme managed by Bournemouth and Poole College.

The Department for Work and Pensions launched 'Universal Jobmatch' in November. This new free online service matches jobseekers CVs and skills to jobs. The system includes a number

⁵ [Child Poverty Needs Assessment](#), Borough of Poole. 2011

⁶ [Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan](#), Borough of Poole. 2011

⁷ [Childcare Sufficiency Assessment](#), Borough of Poole. 2011

⁸ Impact Assessment: Universal Credit, Department for Work and Pensions. December 2012.

⁹ [Welfare Reform Job Seekers Allowance and Employment Support Allowance](#), Borough of Poole. January 2014

features to speed up the job search and recruitment processes, including a notification process for employers to see jobseekers that match their requirements.

Families with Futures

Families with Futures works with some of the most complex families in the Borough to help them to address their own difficulties in a positive and sustainable way. Accessing employment is a key outcome identified by Government and attracts a results payment. The Council, along with its partners on the Poole Partnership, has given this programme a high priority and additional funding. The programme is focused on helping families find and keep jobs – for example, the scheme provides funding for the Borough’s Family Champions who work positively with families to help remove barriers to employment. Families impacted by welfare changes have been identified and have been prioritised through the programme.

Families with Children

In addition to the Child Poverty Strategy, the web based Family Information Directory has been developed to include a section on money and welfare. This is being used by family outreach, pastoral care, special educational needs coordinators and parent champions to support families affected by welfare reforms. All these front line staff are being made aware of the welfare reforms and their likely impacts and will ensure this knowledge is shared with others working with children and families. The web based Directory will be available to those who have access to the internet.

Employment and Worklessness Action Group

There is a significant amount of activity designed to help Poole residents into employment. To ensure the various actions, services and initiatives have maximum possible effect a task and finish group of senior Borough of Poole Officers and relevant external agencies has been established to;

Develop a better coordinated approach to helping people obtain support to access employment.

Build a sound understanding of gaps in service provision and produce proposals to address these gaps.

The group have identified a small number of projects under the headings of maximising the potential of young people, informed confident and motivated communities and helping the long term unemployed. These projects form the basis of an action plan which will be taken forward over the next 12 to 18 months.

Supporting People with Low Incomes

In addition to supporting people to find employment, Poole Housing Partnership (PHP) has led on a financial inclusion project which has supported people living on a low income. Through the ‘Your Money’ project they have helped more than 1,200 households in Poole to maximise their income and reduce outgoings. The project helps ensure people are claiming their entitlement to benefits, including improving access to financial products through, for example, promoting the Credit Union. The estimated annual gain to Poole residents from the ‘Your Money’ project is £113,470. The Council also invested with PHP in solar panels which provide practical cost savings on energy bills for people on limited incomes on their energy costs. The Council has continued to support the Citizens’ Advice Bureau which has seen demand for its

services rise significantly over the past few years with additional funding provided this year to support people impacted by changes to their benefits.

Central Government has increased grant funding to Poole's DHP budget by £150,132. The DHP budget for 2013/14 is £275,652. This additional funding will help meet the extra demand for DHPs expected as a result of under occupation of social housing and the benefit cap.

As the local administrator of the DHP fund the Borough is revising its DHP Policy to accommodate these welfare reforms and to ensure effective targeting of information and monitoring the take up of support.

The Borough's Benefits Service has notified all customers potentially affected and their landlords. Affected claimant households have been informed that they may apply for DHP's and landlords including Poole Housing Partnership (PHP) are in communication with their tenants to offer assistance.

Targeted work on moving under occupying households to smaller properties began in January 12. At the time of writing 24 households have moved releasing 67 bedrooms. A further 18 have committed to move which will release a further 56 bedrooms.

PHP, with financial support from Housing Services, employ a Tenancy Support Officer. Their role is to support all social housing tenants who are under-occupying within the Poole area by providing practical support and information to find and move into more suitable accommodation. They also Work with social housing landlords creatively to incentivise house moves to release family accommodation.

Priority Places

In addition to the support provide to individuals and families, the Council recognise the need to support communities where the impact of these changes is concentrated. The Council and Poole Partnership have been proactive in funding a neighbourhood management project in one of the most deprived community in Poole. The Bourne Estate Neighbourhood Management Project has encouraged community members to become more active and built confidence and resilience within the community. The Council continues to invest in community development support for other areas of deprivation including Poole Town and Turlin Moor.

Conclusions

Poverty is an issue in Poole. People experiencing poverty have less opportunity to benefit from the life and successes of Poole. The purpose of the Council is to improve the quality of life of all people in Poole. The Council also has a financial incentive to take action to reduce poverty. Action is being taken by the Council to reduce poverty and its impacts on residents and communities in Poole.

Further Details

For further details or queries about this report, please contact Pete Stratford, Corporate Strategy and Communications Team, Borough of Poole. Tel 01202 633306, or email p.stratford@poole.gov.uk.

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