

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL ADDRESSING POVERTY ISSUES AND THE IMPACT ON LEARNING

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of the report is to update the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel on the outcomes that have emerged as a result of cross-departmental collaboration to reduce the impact of poverty and the impact these have on learning.

BACKGROUND

2. During 2019/2020, the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel investigated the topic of Addressing Poverty Issues and the Impact on Learning.

The purpose of the scrutiny panel's review was to examine whether effective and successful models of support are in place, in Middlesbrough, to:

- tackle the root causes of poverty
- mitigate the effects of disadvantage on education

3. **The recommendations identified aimed to:**

- 3.1 Develop a partnership to deliver a more joined-up, collaborative and integrated approach to tackle poverty and promote social mobility, cutting cross employment support, welfare, housing, early years provision, education, public health and family support
- 3.2 Develop a coherent strategy to be developed to ensure that poverty remains high up on the agenda for every organisation in Middlesbrough and to maximise resources available across all sectors and agencies (including the Voluntary Community Sector). develop a robust action plan to address any weaknesses or areas for development which have been identified
- 3.3 Develop a monitoring tool to effectively measure poverty rates and trends in Middlesbrough ensure their self-evaluation accurately reflects the school's safeguarding practice
- 3.4 Submit data on an annual basis, to the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel, to demonstrate the impact of its work and to highlight the practices, interventions and strategies that have been most successful in tackling poverty
- 3.5 Work with the Financial Inclusion Group to ensure there is a greater presence from advisers offering debt advice and benefits support and advice in the community
- 3.6 Work with schools to capture an accurate baseline of individual children's attainment as early as possible (on entry to nursery) to inform planning and maximise learning
- 3.7 Work with **Children North East (CNE)** to:
 - arrange training for teachers on the barriers to learning that exist because of poverty;
 - identify common threads that exist in schools; and
 - develop a good practice guide that highlights the effective practices used in tackling the root causes of poverty and mitigating the effects of disadvantage

3.8 Work with schools and catering suppliers to encourage implementation of recommendations proposed by the **Just Change** campaign

3.9 Write to the Secretary of State for Education to request that census data for early years is collected in July instead of January, when numbers are at their highest - as this data determines the Dedicated Schools Grant for the following year

OUTCOMES

4. The following actions were taken to address each of the recommendations:

The mapping exercise concluded that partnerships were already established.

It found that collaborative practice was already in place and led by the work Middlesbrough Council's Financial Inclusion Group (FIG). Underpinned by the vision '**All communities in Middlesbrough will have access to appropriate financial services, advice and information that enables them to manage their money on a day to day basis, plan for the future and deal effectively with financial hardship,**' partners and member organisations provide a range of services in order to mitigate the impact of poverty in order to decrease the likelihood of communities experiencing poor mental health, family breakdown, domestic violence and a limited range of life choices.

In addition to FIG, the Employment Network Group (ENG) and Northern Skills Group led by Middlesbrough College brings together the expertise and experience of the College and NECC Training and focuses on helping people overcome barriers such as sexual orientation, disability, age, gender and faith so that routes to employment are equitable. This ENG also links with school leavers in order to develop sector skills linking to employment.

The Financial Inclusion Group (FIG) already has a strong presence in the community offering debt and benefits support and advice. Middlesbrough Council recently brought the Unclaimed Benefits Campaign & Hub Advice Service under one project. This collaboration was developed by FIG and is led by Welfare Rights Unit. Partner organisations are Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Age UK, Cleveland Housing and Advice Centre (CHAC) and Achieving Change Through Enterprising Solutions (ACTES). It is a free service and offers support to residents making sure they receive the correct benefit entitlement. During COVID the team identified families who were not claiming the correct amount of benefit and this has now been rectified.

Hub Advice Service is available from:

- Thorntree Hub
- Hemlington Hub
- Grove Hill
- Newport
- Easterside

Citizens Advice provide services from:

- North Ormesby
- Acklam Green Centre

Bishops Garth (Carmel Research School in Darlington) is currently working with schools in Middlesbrough to develop initiatives which aim to break the link between family income and educational outcomes - improving success and life chances for disadvantaged pupils in particular. Head of Achievement, Karen Smith is a board member for this programme.

The mapping process has provided reassurance that all multi agency working already takes place. Relevant stakeholders are working together to collectively mitigate the impact of poverty on learning.

Other strategies that address poverty and financial inclusion are co-ordinated, and link with the FIG. These strategies include:

- Middlesbrough's Food Partnership Food Action Plan, 2020-2022 (MEC). This includes providing Eco Shops within schools providing low cost healthy food for families.
- South Tees Affordable Warmth Plan, 2020-2022 (MEC). Ensuring no families need to live in fuel poverty through a variety of programmes
- The Carmel Research programme (mentioned above) will raise the profile of poverty within many Middlesbrough schools – Evidence Leaders in Education (ELE) will provide training to schools and be involved in implementing change for better outcomes for low income families

Monitoring tools which measure poverty rates and trends are already in place. The Financial Inclusion Group already produces a quarterly Welfare Reform monitoring report including data on food bank usage, numbers accessing financial advice and housing support (example attached at Appendix 1).

A range of data is already being collected which measures the societal impact of poverty.

Public Health England gather annual data on poverty levels across Local Authority areas: www.fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/Poverty

The Local Authority continues to work positively with schools to capture an accurate baseline of individual children's attainment as early as possible (on entry to nursery) to inform planning and maximise learning. Significant data is also gathered annually by the Achievement Team and is used to help prioritise support in schools aimed at improving the quality of education and outcomes for all. Since January 2021, Private and Voluntary Nursery Settings (PVI) owner and manager meetings take place monthly. These allow for key messages, issues and best practice to be shared. In addition, a transition document has been successfully piloted during the summer term (full implementation September 2021). The document contains both academic and non-academic capturing children's progress including narrative around what makes them successful learners. This is shared with their next learning setting.

Staff within Education make visits to schools and Private & Voluntary Independent Settings in order to offer advice, support and challenge as well as training. These visits help the Achievement team further understand improvement priorities and capture local intelligence meaning that effective and bespoke support can be offered. The Early Years Development Lead undertakes focused improvement plans and Network meetings for practitioners disseminate key messages.

In preparation for the Early Years reforms statutory as of September 2021, Early Years (EY) Development Lead and the Early Years Quality Lead have delivered briefings to schools, early year's settings and childminders to help them feel prepared for the statutory roll out of the Reforms.

Response, attendance and feedback has been very positive:

- 90% of PVIs attended – 198 attendees
- 73% of childminders – 50 attendees
- 85% of schools – 133 attendees including 25 head teachers, 106 EY Leads, EY Teachers, EY TAs and academy leads

- The briefing has also been shared with the Virtual Schools, School Readiness and Governor Services teams

Children's Centres work with parents providing parenting support in order to develop learning at home. The School Readiness team work to support families and offer range of interventions which support early childhood development.

Children's Centre activities include:

- Baby play and Stay and Play sessions: usually delivered on a weekly basis in each centre but since March 2020, staff are ringing parents who would attend to check-in with them to discuss baby/child development. We've had some really good feedback on this. Currently looking at piloting a Baby Play virtually.
- **Healthy child drop-in clinics** (run weekly at all CC's usually but health visitors carrying out as part of their home delivery model at the moment.
- **HENRY** (Healthy eating and nutrition in the really young) joint virtual delivery at present with health colleagues, groups and 1-1 sessions with parents.
- **Family Links Early Years Parenting programme:** usually delivered in groups in the centre or one to one in family homes depending on family's needs. Currently being delivered virtually.
- **Healthy Start Vitamins:** staff are involved in the distribution of these vitamins via the post to eligible parents.
- **Various book gifting programmes,** as part of the Early Years literacy pathway.

In addition, Middlesbrough's multi-agency children's hub (MACH) now share family information which is used to identify families who are in need of advice and guidance ensuring they have access to relevant to childcare and funding as well as support services. In addition for those children under 5 who are referred to Early Help, School Readiness Team are notified so contact can be made and support made available. We are now being notified of every new birth so again contact can be made and support offered.

The Middlesbrough Best Start Pathway (BSP), developed in partnership by Middlesbrough Council and the Harrogate and District Foundation Trust (HFDT), recognises that some families require additional support, whilst others can safely be supported through the universal Healthy Child Programme (HCP). In line with providing holistic, coordinated packages of support to families in greatest need, the BSP will involve the delivery of integrated support by Health Visitors and the Local Authority (Education School Readiness Team) and other partner organisations where appropriate. For the Local Authority, this will involve **five contacts** with the family. Working in partnership with parents and carers, these Local Authority contacts will primarily focus on improving knowledge, skills and confidence so that they are better able to provide the opportunities needed for their children to develop skills that will enable them to reach their full potential.

Ensuring that every child and young person in Middlesbrough has equal access to high quality education that increases and improves life chances, through achievement of the best possible outcomes at every stage of their learning journey and beyond. So the **Learning and Education Strategy 2021-24** clearly sets out how, through collaboration, we have a real opportunity to solve local issues using local school based solutions.

We recognise there are some factors outside of our remit of influence that impact on young people's ability to make academic progress. However, this work, informed by the actions of the Children and Young People's Partnership, aims to tackle every aspect in our power to improve the lives and outcomes of children and young people in Middlesbrough, and is underpinned by the following core Partnership principles:

- To improve the lives of children remains at the heart of everything we do and decide
- Focus on the strengths and building resilience
- Prioritise prevention and intervening at the earliest point
- Strive for fairness in outcomes and narrowing the gap of inequality
- Listen to children, young people and families and respond

(Copies of the data gathered and the Learning & Education Strategy can be made available to Scrutiny Panel)

Engagement with Children North East in order to Poverty Proof the school day has taken place previously. Audits have been completed and schools now implement their own mechanism for supporting pupils and their families. For example, many schools across Middlesbrough offer Eco or Fair Share shops offering parents subsidised food and clothing. A uniform pledge has recently been implemented in Middlesbrough. The pledge asks schools to agree to limit the number of personalised items allowing for cheaper alternatives to be purchased and adopt 4 key principles:

1. We will carry out a review of the cost of our school uniform, and publish the outcome on our school website.
2. We will make sure non-branded generic clothing accounts for at least three quarters of all the uniform items a child needs.
3. Where branding is important, we will prescribe iron or sew on badges and logos for at least three quarters of all the items, allowing parents to purchase generic clothing.
4. The total cost of all the required branded clothing for any child will not exceed £40.

Already, many primary schools offer financial support towards the cost of uniforms and PE kits. To ensure all pupils had access to remote and digital learning the Council made a £350k investment helping schools to provide devices and WIFI connectivity during periods of self-isolation or school closure.

Actions:

1. Education representation at the Financial Inclusion Group
2. Support schools to implement recommendations set out in the Just Change Campaign.

EXAMPLE of quarterly Welfare Reform Performance Monitoring Data
Homelessness / CAB / Foodbank / General Quarterly Update

Performance Indicator	Outturn 2019/20	Q1 2020/21	Q2 2020/21	Q3 2020/21	Q4 2020/21	Year To Date
No accepted as homeless	529	371	274	154		
No. of households in temporary accommodation	75	37	183	228		
Preventing Repossession Fund	£38,370.03	£39,399.08	£40,326.55	£40,232.22		
Homeless prevention Fund (available)	£3,767.16	£2,896.15	TBC	TBC		
No of families accessing Middlesbrough Foodbank	3,070	900	423	301		
Total number of adults / children accessing Middlesbrough Foodbank	8,577	4,643	3,179	2,017		
Number of people accessing Middlesbrough FIG Hub Advice Networks	1,761	504	290	280		
Information on numbers of clients approaching CAB for advice	10,080	1,370	1,633	1,276		
Of the above, number of people approaching CAB for debt advice	1,766	136	220	194		
Number of carers seeking benefit advice from Carer's Together	485	97	115	112		
Number of new accounts opened within the credit union	1,261	84	133*	425**		
Number of people accessing Welfare Rights for assistance	3,424	763	702	736		
Number of people receiving assistance through Thirteen groups Money Advice and Universal Credit Support teams	2,473	556	533	477		

Quarter 2 Commentary

- *111 new accounts opened with South Tees Community Bank and 22 from Pioneer Credit Union in Q2
- **229 new accounts opened with Pioneer Credit Union and 196 with South Tees Community Bank in Q3
- As you will see, there has been a drop in the number of families accessing foodbank in Q2 and Q3. However, the total number of clients

within the financial and calendar year is still higher compared to the previous period. To illustrate this, the foodbank have also provided a spreadsheet for the calendar year to give the full picture which is attached

- The number of people accepted as homeless has shown a marked reduction quarter on quarter. However, the number of people in temporary accommodation in the current climate is significantly higher than normal and continues to rise.

Middlesbrough Council Quarterly Update – Welfare Reform

Performance Indicator	Outturn 2019/20	Q1 2020/21	Q2 2020/21	Q3 2020/21	Q4 2020/21	Year To Date
Total no of tenants subject to under occupation	1,372	1,324	1,261	1,221		
Of the above, number who are classed as having 1 spare room	1,069	1,031	979	947		
Number who are classed as having 2 or more spare rooms	303	293	282	274		
Of the total number subject to under occupancy, how many are Thirteen group tenants	1,098	1,057	1,013	976		
No tenants subject to Housing Benefit Cap	128	116	102	93		

Quarter 2 Commentary

- The benefit information above is only showing a very slight movement. This could be attributed due to the lockdown and residents not moving / taking on new tenancies

Revenues & Benefits Quarterly Update

Details	Outturn 2019/20	Q1 2020/21	Q2 2020/21	Q3 2020/21	Q4 2020/21	Year To Date 2020/21	Comments
Discretionary Housing Payment							
- Number of applications	2,213	645	324	382			
- Number awarded	1,880	496	252	286			
- Number not awarded	333	149	72	96			
DHP spent as a % of total budget	105.07%	17.02%	47.90%	55.05%			
Housing Benefit							
Average days for processing a new Housing Benefit claim	18.10	20.28	17.41	18.41			
Average days for processing a Housing Benefit change in circumstances	4.23	3.34	4.45	3.62			
Number of telephone calls answered about Housing Benefit / CTR	18,962	6,875	5,387	5564			
Number of face to face enquiries about Housing Benefit / CTR	15,651	Nil	Nil	Nil			
Council Tax collection rate	91.60%	26.41%	51.75%	77.17%			
Local Welfare Provision (Community Support)							
Number of awards for crisis support	288	59	40	61			
Number of awards for community support	164	15	36	37			
Number not approved	681	378	175	264			
Total amount of payments made	£148,687.57	£17,560.01	£31,420.46	£42510.78			
Quarter 1 Commentary							
<p>Expenditure for discretionary housing payments is low when compared to the funding available. A number of initiatives are currently being undertaken, including the promotion of this to residents who have a spare bedroom for benefit purposes and have not applied for assistance through this scheme. It is anticipated that all of the funding will be spent by the financial year end as a result of increased activities within the service. The performance of the benefit service remains excellent when compared to national averages</p>							