

8 March 2016		ITEM: 9
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Child Poverty – Opportunity for Every Child – Action Plan Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Michele Lucas, Interim Strategic Lead Learning & Skills		
Accountable Manager: Michele Lucas, Interim Strategic Lead Learning & Skills		
Accountable Director: David Archibald, Interim Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides an update around progress that has taken place within our Child Poverty Action Plan – it builds on the request by Children's Overview & Scrutiny to consider how the action plan is being imbedded across a range of different council departments and external organisations, recognising that Thurrock Council has taken a lead on this work.

The Action Plan is working towards a place where every child has the same chance to achieve his or her potential; where no child lacks food or the basic necessities of family life, or lives in poor housing, or in families where parents are unable to work; where every child attends a good school; and where every child has ready access to a range of leisure, cultural and sporting opportunities.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 To support the work undertaken in the Child Poverty Action plan and identify other ways in which we can promote the child poverty agenda across the Council and external partners.

1.2 To actively promote volunteering opportunities in local wards thus promoting and encouraging more community engagement and discussion around child poverty and ways of addressing it.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Child Poverty in Thurrock

A full needs assessment has been undertaken in Thurrock and can be seen at <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/strategies/key-strategies-and-policies/child-poverty/needs-analysis>

2.2 In summary, the key findings¹ are:

- A fifth of children in Thurrock live in relative poverty. 7955 children live in families with an income less than 60% of national median income before housing costs. In broad terms, child poverty has remained at much the same level since 2008.
- The majority, 7210, were aged 0-16, 5435 were aged 0-10; 2760 were aged 0-4.
- Child poverty is slightly above the national average (18.6%) and significantly above the level for Eastern region (15.1%).

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 **To meet the 2020 target of less than 10 per cent of children living in relative poverty we would have to reduce this category in Thurrock, by at least 4,000 children - more to take account of population growth**

3.2 The action plan looks to address the following strategic priorities:

- To increase parental employment and skills by providing access to adult training and skills development through the Wishes adult skills Programme and progression to adult learning opportunities.
- To increase benefit take-up by improving high quality advice and guidance targeted to areas where there is a high prevalence of poverty and workless households.
- To reduce attainment gaps between children living in poverty and those who don't by targeting school improvement to those areas and supporting parents to be able to support their children through, for example, adult learning opportunities.
- To reduce the health inequalities faced by some families by developing a targeted, integrated approach to local delivery of services.
- To support the need to prevent homelessness from occurring by addressing the underlying causes of homelessness through effective partnerships, collaboration and the coordination of services.

3.3 With the inclusion of Public Health and the work around developing a health & wellbeing strategy this has formed one of the strategic priorities in the Health & Wellbeing Strategy which is currently being consulted on.

3.4 This recognises the need to address child poverty when considering a number of health inequalities and will provide opportunities for a more integrated

approach in addressing some of the root causes that have a significant impact on child poverty.

3.5 One of our key strategic priorities relates to supporting parents back into work recognising that worklessness is one of the contributory factors around child poverty. Thurrock Council have continued to look at ways in which we can support this, including the two programmes outlined below.

3.6 Wishes – an adult learning programme to support parents into work

3.7 Wishes is an innovative project aimed at parents and carers in Thurrock who have a lack of qualifications, it is specifically aimed at parents and carers who have Level 1 or below qualifications. The Wishes Project works with Parents and Carers to remove barriers to learning and can provide support with things such as childcare and transport costs in order for them to take those daunting first steps back into a learning environment.

3.8 The Project provides an opportunity for its learners to increase their confidence, recognise the skills that they have, enhance their soft skills and be supported to gain both accredited and non-accredited qualifications. Learners are also supported and encouraged to actively participate in voluntary opportunities to put their learning into practice and gain valuable experience in order to become job ready.

3.9 Current Learners on Programme

Course Title 2015-16	Entry Level	Level 1	Level 2	Intro to	GCSE	Sort courses 4 or 6 weeks
ESOL (English for Speakers of other languages)	1					
Literacy	2			1	3	
Numeracy	1			1	3	
Bookkeeping		2				
Counselling				1		
Electrical installations			1			
Floristry						2

Hairdressing		2	2	1		
Health & Social care		3		1		
IT						1
Learning support Asst			2			
Massage						1
Voluntary	8					
						31 ON COURSES 8 volunteering

- 3.10 A number of learners completing level 1 and 2 this year started off with an introduction to or short course last academic year, therefore continuing their Wishes journey.
- 3.11 We currently have eight learners volunteering this year in a range of different placements. The Wishes project has three Wishes Champions that support the project in coffee mornings and presentations, two Champions are ex Wishes learners who are able to share their Wishes journey to potential learners and this has proved to be a powerful tool in recruiting other learners to the programme
- 3.12 Children's Centre Volunteers – addressing Child Poverty
- More than thirty parents have received introductory training to act as volunteers in children's centres. This has included training in understanding and identifying child poverty. The majority are now actively volunteering, helping to run sessions for parents and children; engaging new families to make use of children's centre services; acting as advisers to other parents; undertaking interpreting; and helping with consultations and evaluations.
- 3.13 An aim of the project is to enable participating parents to increase their vocationally related skills and a number have already moved into paid work. Each parent is assigned to a role within the children's centres which will help them to move towards their chosen employment goals.
- 3.14 Children's centre volunteers are aware of child poverty and contribute to signposting to relevant services. A new volunteer role to encourage low-

income families to take up the offer of free early education for their two year olds has been developed.

- 3.15 The parent volunteers share a commitment to helping their communities and have formed their own family college – a community group with the aim of addressing and mitigating child poverty through learning activities and practical projects e.g. toy libraries, clothes exchanges and other money saving ideas.
- 3.16 Three volunteers have undertaken introductory training in welfare benefits. This will shortly be cascaded to other volunteers who will act as advisers, on basic welfare rights to children's centre users and other parents in the community.
- 3.17 The family college group aims to engage other parents in contributing to and participation in new learning activities, run by parents for other parents and enlisting paid facilitators where necessary. A particular focus will be to engage parents who will not normally enrol on a course or qualification. A consultation across the five directly managed children's centres is almost complete and this will be followed by the roll-out of study and activity groups.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Action Plan is working towards a place where every child has the same chance to achieve his or her potential; where no child lacks food or the basic necessities of family life, or lives in poor housing, or in families where parents are unable to work; where every child attends a good school; and where every child has ready access to a range of leisure, cultural and sporting opportunities.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 A range of workshops have taken place in Children Centres to discuss with Parents how they feel we can ensure Opportunity for all Children. We have arranged meetings with a range of directorates across the LA recognising the need for a whole council approach to tackling child poverty. We are in the process of training a group of volunteers who will become child poverty champions across the Borough.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 This report contributes to the following corporate priorities:
 - create a great place for learning and opportunity
 - encourage and promote job promotion and economic prosperity

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
Finance Manager

This work undertaken within this report is funded via a range of funding streams, including 2 year old funding and core funding attached to children centres and community hubs. We are exploring ways in which we can further secure funding opportunities for our work with volunteers recognising that this provides a bridge to residents gaining employment opportunities.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor – Children’s Safeguarding

The Committee is asked to note the report content under the remit of the Committee’s terms of reference and powers.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development & Equalities Manager

Equality of opportunity is a key principle in the delivery of our ambitious child poverty strategy action plan, we have linked this into the work undertaken by Thurrock’s fairness commission. The current work being undertaken in the health & welling strategy further imbeds the importance of this work.

By working with other council directorates we are ensuring that the responsibility for this work is linked to other departments which will ensure a more integrated approach to the challenge of reducing child poverty across our local communities.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council’s website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Child Poverty Action Plan

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