

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

TO:	CCEA SCRUTINY PANEL		
DATE:	17 <sup>th</sup> March 2010	AGENDA ITEM:	9
TITLE:	ANTI-POVERTY ACTION PLAN		
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide the CCEA Panel with an update on progress with the anti-poverty work, including the development of a poverty profile and performance management framework as requested at the meeting of the Panel on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2009. The report also highlights the implications of the Child Poverty Bill for this work and how its potential requirements can be integrated with existing local activity.
- 1.2 Appendices: latest version of the action plan; basket of performance indicators; child poverty map of Reading based on the baseline information for the new definition of national indicator NI 116.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the panel considers the implications of the emerging evidence base and profile of poverty in Reading.
- 2.2 That the panel notes the progress made on developing the Action Plan and provides input to develop and refine this and the associated performance framework.

2.3 That the panel supports the holistic approach to addressing poverty in the round whilst fulfilling the need to meet the requirements of the Child Poverty Bill should this become law.

### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 In June 2006 Cabinet agreed a "Framework for Eliminating Poverty in Reading". The framework was subsequently endorsed by the Reading 2020 partnership. This also provided a specific role for the CCEA Scrutiny Panel in monitoring the framework and related poverty indicators and a number of updates and reports have been considered by the Panel. In particular the Panel has considered a draft Anti-poverty Action Plan and endorsed the overall strategic framework and partnership action plan approach. The Panel also requested regular updates on progress as the work was developed. The antipoverty framework provided an agreed structure for developing the Action plan based on the themes of:

- "No Wrong Door" - improved integrated working
- Better Understanding needs from a user perspective
- Responsive accessible childcare
- Increase the employability of adults
- Income maximisation
- Sustainable communities - targeted partnership working to maximise impact in poor neighbourhoods.

3.2 At a national level the profile and significance of anti-poverty work has been heightened by the Government's renewed commitment to end child poverty. The Child Poverty Bill is currently being progressed through Parliament and with cross-party support there is a strong possibility that this Bill will become statute before the end of the current Parliament. The Bill will require upper tier local authorities to develop a Child Poverty strategy.

3.3 Reducing Child Poverty is also a priority locally with the relevant National Indicator (NI 116) a key target in Reading's second Local Area Agreement (LAA).

### 4. THE PROPOSAL

#### (a) Current Position:

General progress was reported to CCEA in December 2009 and the work of the Anti-poverty Delivery Group is continuing, further developing initiatives and the Action Plan (latest version attached at appendix 1). This work is generating much closer collaborative working across the Council and with Jobcentreplus in particular.

In parallel the Child Poverty Bill continues to progress through Parliament and latest information is that it is expected to become statute prior to the next election. The Child Poverty Bill will make it a statutory requirement for all upper tier authorities and their named local partners to:

- Cooperate to put in place arrangements to work with partners to reduce and mitigate the effects of child poverty;
- Prepare and publish a **local child poverty needs assessment**;
- Prepare a **joint child poverty strategy**.

Current levels of engagement from key statutory partners and Governance arrangements linked to the LSP and SCS are not as well developed locally as envisaged in the legislation.

Despite the revised definition for NI 116, LAA targets will be set using the old definition linked to children in workless households. This target is currently being negotiated with GOSE as part of the LAA refresh process but, in acknowledgement of the impact of recession, will be a relative target linked to performance vis a vis national averages rather than an absolute one. With one year to go for the LAA and limited rewards this is something of a distraction from the real needs to address the issue.

Reading has also continued to participate as a member of a small cohort of local authorities liaising with national and regional bodies on the development of a fit for purpose performance framework. Reading is also part of a group that has been consulted on the draft statutory guidance for the Child Poverty Bill in February.

The Child Poverty national indicator (NI 116) forms part of Reading's LAA and new data has recently been made available on a revised definition that incorporates in-work poverty - on this measure 22.3% of all Reading's children under 19 and 23.3% of all those under 16 are classified as in poverty. This data, along with a basket of broader indicators, will form the basis of a needs analysis (see appendices 2 & 3).

**(b) Options Proposed**

The work of the Anti-Poverty Delivery Group provides an established mechanism to take forward the requirements of the Bill supported by other existing processes, for example the work in hand to further develop the Children and Young People's Plan Needs Assessment, JSNA and to produce a Local Economic Assessment should all inform the required needs assessment.

Similarly, the existing poverty strategy framework and action plan provide a basis for the required joint child poverty strategy. However, further bolstering the involvement of key statutory partners is desirable and governance arrangements currently fall short of the Bill's expectations.

The obvious difference in Reading's approach is that it does not limit itself to child poverty, albeit this is an understandably prominent component. For a host of practical reasons in relation to the nature of key interventions around worklessness, benefit take-up and financial inclusion it is considered that this more holistic approach should be maintained.

**(c) Other Options Considered**

With a strong national focus on child poverty with impending legislation there has been an option to refocus the group and plan purely around child poverty. Given the range of actions and stakeholders that would be common to any strategy to tackle poverty across age ranges this option has been rejected. In addition there is the broader issue that families are increasingly non-nuclear, especially in deprived areas, and increasing income and opportunities across all age-ranges is likely to have beneficial knock on impacts for children in any case.

**5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

- 5.1 Addressing poverty more effectively will impact positively on all of the Council's strategic aims through increasing the skills levels and employability of the workforce, contributing to learning objectives and addressing inequality and social inclusion.
- 5.2 The development of an Anti-poverty Action Plan is a direct response to priorities contained within Reading's Sustainable Community Strategy and associated Local Area Agreement targets.

**6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 6.1 A section of the Action Plan specifically seeks to address issues of engagement and in particular how people experiencing poverty can have a direct role in developing and influencing the plan.
- 6.2 Improving availability, accessibility, quality and consistency of information and advice to individuals and communities is an explicit objective of the plan

**7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Much of the work currently being progressed will contribute significantly to being able to fulfil the statutory obligations relating to child poverty should the Child Poverty Bill become law.

**8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 None directly.

**9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 9.1 Anti-poverty Action Plan reports to CCEA Scrutiny 18<sup>th</sup> February 2009 and 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2009.  
Shaping Reading's Future - Sustainable Community Strategy 2008 - 2011.  
Reading Local area Agreement 2008 - 2011.  
Child Poverty Bill.