

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT BY MANAGING DIRECTOR

TO:	Health and Wellbeing Board		
DATE:	21st March 2014	AGENDA ITEM:	7
TITLE:	Tackling Poverty In Reading		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	Cllr Lovelock	PORTFOLIO:	Leader
SERVICE:	Corporate Support Services - Policy	WARDS:	Borough-wide
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To report on the Tackling Poverty in Reading Event 19th November 2013 at which 7 Council pledges and over 50 community and partner pledges were made.
- .2 A draft Tackling Poverty in Reading strategy and action plan is prepared based on those priorities and pledges.
- .3 It is proposed that the Health and Wellbeing Board be the lead on the Health and Well-being theme of the tackling Poverty strategy.
- .4 The Tackling Poverty Delivery Partnership oversees and monitors the development of the strategy and action plan; and the delivery of the priorities and pledges made at the event.
- .5 The Health and Wellbeing Board is invited to recommend health service representatives to join the Tackling Poverty Delivery Partnership
- .6 Appendix 1 provides a report on the event.
- .7 Appendix 2 provides a list of the priorities identified through the event and the pledges made.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the board note the report.
- 2.2 It is proposed that the Health and Wellbeing Board be the lead on the Health and Well-being theme of the tackling Poverty strategy.
- 2.3 The Health and Wellbeing Board is invited to recommend health service representatives to join the Tackling Poverty Delivery Partnership

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 In June 2006 Reading Borough Council's Cabinet agreed a "Framework for Eliminating Poverty in Reading".
- 3.2 Under the Child Poverty Act 2010, local authorities and named partner authorities have a statutory duty to co-operate to reduce and mitigate the impacts of child poverty in their area (these named partner authorities to whom the duty applies include health, the police, youth offending teams, probation and Jobcentre Plus); to prepare and publish a local child poverty needs assessment and prepare a joint child poverty strategy for the local area.

3.3 The national Child Poverty Strategy focuses on 4 key areas:

1. Life Chances - breaking the cycle.
2. Those who can't work - income maximisation.
3. Employability / Low Income - up-skilling and support.
4. Sustainable Communities - improving quality of life in more deprived neighbourhoods.

3.4 In 2011 the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) adopted a new Sustainable Community Strategy based around an agreed vision for Reading in 2030. This Strategy identified breaking the cycle of poverty, early intervention and building capable communities as key policy priorities to address inequality and create the conditions for the longer-term socio-economic success of the town.

3.5 LSP Delivery groups are working on these three priorities.

3.6 The Council holds an annual community engagement event. The aim of the Council's 2013 annual event on 19th November 2013 was to initiate the development of a strategy to tackle poverty in Reading in a context where welfare reforms, reducing public sector expenditure and the slow economic recovery are creating increasing hardship for many of residents, including some of the most vulnerable; and where there is an increasing negative public perception about people in poverty.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Event Report

4.1.1 A report on the 'Tackling Poverty in Reading' event is attached at Appendix 1. The event was designed and delivered in partnership with key organisations working at the frontline of poverty in Reading: Reading Citizens Advice Bureau, Reading Community Welfare Rights Unit, Christian Community Action, the Council's own Financial Crisis Support Scheme and Reading UK CIC.

4.1.2 It aimed to give an insight into the current situation on poverty in Reading and identify specific practical actions that partners and the community will work on together. It presented key current local data, testimonies of people in poverty in Reading and perspectives from the organisations working with people in poverty in Reading.

4.1.3 The main focus of the event was participation in workshops to ensure the attendees had an opportunity to contribute to the development of the key priorities and take responsibility for action. When participants registered for the event they were asked to say what their main concern was about poverty in Reading. This gave us a good insight into the main issues for Reading. Their responses were used to theme the workshops which were:

1. Advice on Tax credits and Entitlements
2. Affordable Credit
3. Support into Work
4. Best start in life
5. In work poverty
6. Affording Basic Needs
7. Disabled People
8. Older People
9. Tackling Poverty in a Multicultural Community
10. Health and Wellbeing

4.1.4 There has been a general consensus that the event went well with good engagement, sharing and networking. Most of all the high attendance (over 200) and number of pledges (over 50) showed the level of concern about poverty in Reading and the desire to work constructively to tackle it.

4.2 Priorities and Pledges

4.2.1 The priorities and pledges from the event are provided at Appendix 2. They are set out by theme of the workshop that they were identified in. However there are occasions where priorities or pledges under one theme cross-reference to those in another theme. Where this is the case this noted and will be picked up by the appropriate theme lead.

4.2.2 In most cases the workshops were led by a partnership or organisation that would be a natural lead for each theme so that the actions will be taken forward as a matter of course by each partnership.

4.2.3 In this way the following partnerships will take responsibility for specific themes:

- Advice on Tax credits and Entitlements - lead Advice Services Partnership
- Affordable Credit - lead Berkshire Community Savings and Loans
- Support into Work - lead LSP Productive Pathways group
- Best start in life - lead LSP Breaking the Cycle of Poverty group
- In work poverty - lead Reading UK CIC
- Affording Basic Needs - lead Tackling Poverty Delivery Partnership
- Regarding Disabled People, Older People, and Tackling Poverty in a Multicultural Community, there are a number of options for leads but the Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality has remit to champion across all equality groups.
- Health and Wellbeing -lead Health and Well-being Board.

4.3 The Council's Pledges

4.3.1 Seven pledges to tackle poverty in Reading were made by Reading Borough Council at the event.

1. Help reduce fuel poverty and help to keep people warm in winter by installing solar panels on 500 of Reading's Council houses and bid for 'Green Deal' funding to target households in most need in the private sector.
2. Tackle fuel poverty and its impact on health this winter by using £75k of the public health budget to provide a Winter Watch Programme, which has not been funded by the Government this year. This would include home energy checks, draught proofing, access to grants for insulation, boiler replacement and repairs, and providing heaters, bedding and emergency payments.
3. Ban advertising on Council property by pay day loan companies who target the vulnerable by charging exorbitant rates of interest on short term loans. This will be

achieved through the adoption of a new Council Advertising Policy.

4. Organise a proactive and effective benefits take up campaign, particularly targeting older people who at the moment are missing out.
5. Build on successful schemes such as SITE at Southcote to provide education, employment and training to lone parents who face particular barriers to employment. City Deal funding will help deliver advice and guidance to build skills and confidence and will include childcare support.
6. Use our City Deal to further enhance schemes to ensure our young people have the skills that employers need.
7. Continue to work towards "Living Wage Accreditation", working where possible with contractors and other employers to achieve the "Reading Living Wage" of £7.71 per hour, which the Council as an employer already guarantees to its own workforce.

4.4 Implementation of the Council' Pledges

4.4.1 The Council's pledges have been implemented as follows:

1. Solar panels

Policy Committee on 2nd December agreed to a programme to install solar panels in 500 Council properties. Installation will take up to nine months to complete.

2. Winter Watch Programme

The Winter Watch 2013 programme is in place, running from December 1st 2013 until 31st March 2014 and offers the following services:

- A home energy check and advice on how to keep warm and healthy at home.
- Draught proofing/ Handyman Service
- Information on and help in accessing energy efficiency grants for loft insulation, cavity wall insulation and boiler replacements/ repairs.
- Help to access an emergency payment where there is severe hardship.
- Emergency equipment - such as heaters and bedding.

The Council has produced and sent leaflets and posters to all surgeries, pharmacies and RBC venues, and community events are being organised to make sure they identify and inform local residents about help they can get.

The Council has teamed up with Reading CAB to increase front line capacity on fuel poverty for 6 months and is working with Aster Living to provide a draught proofing service.

3. Ban advertising on Council property by pay day loan companies

The Council's Policy Committee on 2nd December passed a policy that any advertising or sponsorship on Council assets would have to adhere to a number of basic principles. These are:

- Legal, decent, honest and truthful
- Created with a sense of responsibility to consumers and to society
- In line with the principles of fair competition

4. Benefits take up campaign

Take up of tax credits and benefits is vital in order to maximise income for those unable to work and those in low paid work. The Advice Services Partnership is leading on this strand of tackling poverty and the Council will work with the partnership to ensure a coordinated approach that develops capacity for support and training for people on claiming. Plans for a Benefit take-up campaign are underway.

The Council's immediate priority is to ensure take up of Winter Watch (detailed in 2. above) and the Financial Crisis Support Scheme.

Following a review of the Financial Crisis Support Scheme we are providing specific staff information sessions to increase staff knowledge and understanding of the scheme and make appropriate referrals.

Education, employment and training to lone parents

The Thames Valley Berkshire City Deal, of which Reading is part (see 6. below), includes, as a key element of the deal, employment brokerage including intensive caseworker support for lone parents. The deal will pilot a new approach targeting lone parents to help them to develop their skills and move them into, or closer to, employment. Building on existing work in development with Job Centre Plus on improving engagement with lone parents and better understanding issues affecting them, we will develop and deliver a lone parent „traineeship“. This will combine high quality personalised information, advice and guidance with help to build skills and confidence, and including a work experience placement. Additional support will be offered to deal with childcare commitments and other challenges faced by lone parents. The target for the deal is to secure employment outcomes for 40% of the pilot group and move a further 60% closer to the labour market through improving skills, confidence and work readiness.

5. City Deal

The Thames Valley Berkshire City Deal focuses on increasing the participation of 16-24 year olds in education, training and work, to develop work-related skills and to streamline the pathway to employment for young people. It was accepted by government and launched on 28 October 2013 with the signing of the deal document by all six unitary authorities and the LEP. The deal will run from 1 April 2014 for a period of three years with the aim to deliver whole system change which will make a difference for young people and businesses in the longer term.

Key outcomes will be:

- Achieve 50% reduction in youth unemployment within 3 years;
- Secure £1.5 million of private sector investment to support employment and up skilling of young people;
- Generate 1,300 new employment opportunities for young people including helping 800 sustain work for at least six months;

- Develop new approaches to help more young people into sustainable employment ensuring 900 young people do not make a repeat claim within 9 months of their last, and increasing the earnings of 450 young people;
- Deliver improvements in existing schemes including 1,500 new work experience placements; create 300 additional Apprenticeships and 800 new Youth Contract Wage Incentives.

6. “Living Wage Accreditation”

The Council is working towards meeting the conditions required to obtain accreditation as a living wage employer. There remain some issues with a few contracts that have not yet been resolved. We intend to work with the Living Wage Foundation to review all our contracts as part of the drive towards accreditation. The Council recently signed up to the Ethical Care Charter as one step on the way to implementing the Living Wage in a significant contract area.

Reading Borough Council has had Low Pay Policy for its own workforce since the late 1980s. However since the living wage used by the Living Wage Foundation is calculated in a different way to our Low Pay Policy benchmark there is a real likelihood that the living wage will exceed the Council’s low pay threshold in about 12months’ time. This is something that will need to be addressed as part of next year’s budget planning. Council officers will be providing a further report to Councillors on the options available in relation to pursuing ‘Living Wage Accreditation’.

Following the Council’s Tackling Poverty in Reading event on 19th November, Reading UK CIC, the Economic Development company for Reading, has taken responsibility for the promotion of the Living Wage campaign in Reading. Its eNewsletter in December which has a circulation list of 600 carried an article promoting the Living wage campaign. Many of the major employers in Reading are already signed up, including Deloitte, Hibu, Kyocera, Lush, Olswang, PWC, and SSE. The Employment and Skills Group has agreed to make the campaign for a Living Wage one of its priorities.’

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 This decision contributes to the Council’s strategic aims to develop a sustainable economy at the heart of the Thames Valley; and to promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all because the strategy and plan will address support into work, low pay and in work poverty, health inequality and will specifically address poverty faced by disabled people, children, older people and ethnic minority communities.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 The Tackling Poverty in Reading event was an open event. Invitations went out to public service providers, businesses, employers, schools, providers of employment, training, voluntary and community organisations, trades unions, faith organisations and residents involvement databases, through both the Council’s and partners’ routes. The event was promoted through the website, twitter and press release. Around 200 people attended on the night.

- 6.2 Participants were invited, when registering, to say what their main concern was about poverty in Reading. This survey gave a good indication of the key Poverty issues for Reading. Their responses were used to theme the workshops.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2 The Equality duty is relevant to the decision to develop a strategy and action plan on tackling poverty in Reading and an Equality Impact Assessment was provided to Policy Committee, 20th January 2014.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Under the Child Poverty Act 2010, local authorities and named partner authorities have a statutory duty to co-operate to reduce and mitigate the impacts of child poverty in their area (these named partner authorities to whom the duty applies include health, the police, youth offending teams, probation and Jobcentre Plus); to prepare and publish a local child poverty needs assessment and prepare a joint child poverty strategy for the local area.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The development of a Tackling Poverty strategy and action plan will be met within existing budgets.
- 9.2 The Council pledges will be met within existing budgets.
- 9.3 There is likelihood that the national living wage calculation will exceed the Council's low pay threshold in about 12month's time.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP POLICY, Policy Committee, 2nd December 2013, Reading Borough Council
- 10.2 PHASE 2 SOLAR PROGRAMME - LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING, Policy Committee, 2nd December 2013, Reading Borough Council
- 10.3 Tackling Poverty in Reading event Participant Pack, 19th November 2013, Reading Borough Council