

'Tackling Poverty in Reading' event, 19th November 2013 - report

1. Introduction

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.

The Local Government Association estimates that as a result of welfare reforms, households claiming benefit in Reading will see their income drop by £1,665 a year. Many of those affected are people who are in work but have incomes that cannot meet the rising costs of living. 1 in 5 children are deemed to be living in poverty in Reading.

Calls to Reading Citizens Advice Bureau have almost doubled since June 2012. Reading Community Welfare Rights Unit reported that during the same period the number of people attending the open door drop in sessions had doubled, food parcel referrals had increased by 200%.

It was felt that whilst it may not be possible to change government policy or macro-economic conditions, it was important to seek to provide the best possible, coherent, local response in order to support Reading's residents.

This would include providing more opportunities for local people to benefit from what remains a strong local economy with good prospects for growth; using what resources there are available to gain maximum impact; and working together in partnership.

2. Design of the Event

A core group of partners were brought together to deliver the event:

- Reading Borough Council
- Reading Citizens Advice Bureau
- Reading Community Welfare Rights Unit
- Christian Community Action,
- Reading UK CIC

The event was designed to achieve the following outcomes:

- Understanding of what Poverty is and what it is like in Reading
- Understanding that poverty is everyone's business
- Identification and best use of the resources that are available
- Maximum benefit from the areas we can influence
- Specific practical actions that we will work on together.



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The programme for the event was designed to provide current facts along side the lived experience of poverty in Reading. Participants were each provided with a participant pack of facts.

Time	What	Who
Chair: Professor Gavin Brooks, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) University of Reading		
6.00	Leaders Welcome	Cllr Jo Lovelock
6.10	Key note address	Alison Garnham, CEO, Child Poverty Action Group
6.30	What does poverty look like in Reading	RBC Reading CAB Welfare Rights Unit CCA and Readifood Reading UK CIC
6.40	What does Poverty Feel like in Reading	Zoe Brown - mother of 3 'My story' - single mum, W. Reading 'Poverty Rules My Life' Rosalyn and Grant's story
7.00	Group Sessions based on your feedback	Participants
7.45	Pledges of Action and Way Forward	Gavin Brooks / Cllr Lovelock

Alison Garnham, CEO, Child Poverty Action was invited to give the keynote address to provide a national overview, drawing on CPAG's 'People Like Us' campaign and their report 'Local authorities and child poverty: balancing threats and opportunities'.

Local partners provided short perspectives on 'What Poverty Looks Like in Reading. This was followed by a series of first hand-accounts on 'What Poverty Feels Like in Reading'. Two mothers provided written statements, a young man made a film called 'Poverty Rules My Life' and video was shown of an interview with a couple who volunteered with Christian Community Action.

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. 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

The task of each workshop was to come up with 3 priority actions that they would sign up to and for participants to make individual pledges.

To ensure that action would be driven forward, the workshops (in most cases) 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.

3. Participants

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.

4. Priorities and Pledges

Over 50 pledges were made on the night. All the priorities and pledges made on the night are posted on our website at <http://www.reading.gov.uk/news/2013/nov/tackling-poverty-reading>

An invitation was provided to join the conversation on Twitter and Facebook #povertyrdg. Several participants and partners used this to generate interest prior to the event and to share pledges and information during and after the event.

5. Media Coverage

The event drew substantial media interest with a BBC South Today news item on the evening and large spreads in both the Reading Chronicle and Evening Post. BBC Radio Berkshire also conducted interviews in the following Monday with the council and a number of the partners.

6. Next steps

The priorities and pledges made will contribute to a new strategy to tackle poverty in Reading. This strategy will be overseen by the Tackling Poverty Delivery Partnership.