Role of local authorities in countering child poverty

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Child poverty is everybody’s business
Newcastle City – some facts

• Regional Capital – North East England
• Population 280,200
• Formerly an area of heavy industry; mining & shipbuilding
• Ethnic minorities 12%
• North east: Unemployed 9.8%
• North East: Average disposable weekly household income after housing costs is £327 (lowest in England)

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Child Poverty Act (March 2010)

- Requires responsible local authorities and their partner authorities to cooperate to reduce and mitigate the effects of child poverty in their local areas.

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Child Poverty: Definitely not a thing of the past
Neighbourhood Vitality Index
What this means

- **Parents:** Walker, Byker, Elswick and Westgate (most disadvantaged wards) have the highest unemployment rates.
- **Children:** 18% of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) achieved 5 good GCSE’s (compared to non-FSM pupils 48%).
- **Children:** 12% of FSM pupils are persistently absent from school (compared to 5% for non-FSM pupils).
- 30.5% children in poverty.
- City council has an on-going strategy to tackle child poverty.
Child Poverty – Recurring Issues

• It is multi-dimensional and not a thing of the past
• It is present in all EU countries despite prosperity
• It is a relative concept in different countries and defined differently
• It is linked to unemployment and low wage incomes
• More prevalent in certain ethnic minority communities, families with substance misuse, disabilities, histories of crime or abuse and refugees.

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What is increasing?

- Unemployment and short time working
- Demand for services and advice
- Looked after and children in care
- Terminations in the over 30 age group
- Demand for social housing and people defaulting on their mortgages
- Childhood obesity and poor nutrition
- In work poverty

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What is decreasing?

- Incomes, wages and availability of social housing
- Resources available for service provision
- Funding for infrastructure projects
- Finances available for social benefits and protection
- Number of under-18’s wanting terminations
- Number of under-18’s not in employment or training
- Spending on social participation (eg clubs, holidays)
- 2.3 million children in UK below 60% median income

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The role of local authorities

- Local authorities are not able to provide increases to income, but can work with others to identify problems and lobby for change.
- They are at the forefront of work to tackle child poverty and disadvantage. Their role is crucial in offering services and activities to promote the wellbeing of families and children.

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Local Authority Services

- Advice, advocacy and Information Services
- Regulation & Enforcement: tobacco, ASB, environment, traffic
- Social Care: social services, child protection, adoption, fostering
- Education: Schools, Children’s Centres, Playgroups
- Housing and the built environment
- Community Centres, Youth Clubs and Libraries (books, events, internet access)
- Sports facilities, parks, open spaces, events, festivals, organised activities

CHILDRENS’ RIGHTS - a policy priority

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Joint working and network links with:

- Health services
- Legal, police and community safety
- Voluntary sector and social enterprises
- Housing providers
- Child care and disability agencies
- Universities and research provision
- Leisure and recreation providers
- Credit unions and financial advice
- Local businesses, industry and training

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Actions to promote wellbeing

- Clear strategies which recognise the nature of the problem and evidence based solutions
- Practical priorities to prevent, mitigate and measure poverty and promote community cohesion
- Advice and information: benefits, training, jobs
- Partnership working with services and facilities as well as other local authorities and agencies
- Promote consultation, empower communities and reduce anti-social behaviour
- Policies to make the local authority ‘child friendly’ and inclusive of ‘child proofing’.
- Improved housing and neighbourhood provision

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How are we reducing child poverty?

- Focus upon 14 – 19: (Apprenticeships and leisure access)
- Physical regeneration, including housing improvements
- Preventing and Tackling Child Poverty
  - Innovation to Increase Employment and raise aspirations
  - Improving support to families eg. Children’s Centres and policy focus
  - Addressing health inequalities and fuel poverty
  - Welfare Rights, financial advice and increasing benefits take-up

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On-going Challenges

- The need to maintain standards alongside financial and resource reductions
- How to meet competing demands for all priority groups (e.g. elderly, disabled)
- Reaching out to the most needy and vulnerable
- Managing the stigma of poverty

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Local Authorities should...

Share learning and good practice with other authorities and partner agencies

• Be prepared to be accountable and be open to research and scrutiny

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Child Poverty Indicators

- UK Government consultation (Nov’12-Feb’13)
- Proposed indicators include:
  - Worklessness, unmanageable debt
  - Access to healthcare and quality education
  - Family stability, parenting skills
  - Nutrition, sanitation
  - Poor Housing

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Thank you. Any questions?

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