

TACKLING CHILD POVERTY

**Report by Service Director Customer & Communities and
Service Director Young People, Engagement & Inclusion**

AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 January 2021

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 **This report provides an overview of the evaluation of the actions that Scottish Borders Council and Partners are taking to tackle Child Poverty in the Scottish Borders.**
- 1.2 The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 requires Local Authorities and Health Boards to jointly prepare a Local Child Poverty Action Plan, Report and an Annual Progress report. A Report, Action Plan and Annual Progress Report for both 2018/19 and 2019/20 were agreed by the Community Planning Partnership Strategic Board, submitted to Scottish Government and published on the Council's website. A current Report and Action Plan for 2020/21 has also been agreed and published with an Annual Progress Report to follow in April 2021.
- 1.3 Annual Progress Reports provide updates from the Council, NHS Borders and other partners on the actions set out for the year and allows evaluation to take place in terms of how effective they are in tackling Child Poverty in the Scottish Borders.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **I recommend that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee notes the methodology and reporting approach taken towards evaluating actions of Scottish Borders Council and Partners in tackling Child Poverty in the Scottish Borders.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 sets out the Scottish Government's statement of intent to eradicate child poverty in Scotland by 2030. Local Authorities and Health Boards are required to jointly prepare a Local Child Poverty Report (including an Action Plan) and subsequently an annual progress report by the end of June each year.
- 3.2 The Child Poverty Planning Group (CPPG) manages the implementation of the Plan and is accountable to the Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership (CPP). The CPPG is a strategic group with senior multi-agency membership and exists to plan actions, undertake actions, and monitor and report actions to the CPP. Membership of the CPPG is shown in Appendix 1.
- 3.3 Action Plans are prepared within themes and outline the activity taking place, which partners are involved, which poverty driver the action seeks to improve, intended beneficiaries/target groups and how the impact will be assessed. The Annual Progress Reports also show an update on each action.
- 3.4 The Poverty and Inequality Commission published a review of the Local Child Poverty Action Reports 2018/19 in December 2019. <https://povertyinequality.scot/publication/review-of-the-local-child-poverty-action-reports/>
A recommendation that was highlighted for local action was 'to review how data and evidence is used to measure progress and ensure effective evaluation and monitoring methods are in place'. Our approach to this recommendation is outlined in Paragraph 7.
- 3.5 Annual Progress Reports were submitted to Scottish Government in June 2019 for 2018/19 (attached as Appendix 2) covering the period of April 2018 to March 2019, and in September 2020 for 2019/20, covering the period of April 2019 to March 2020 (link below). These reports contained updates on actions taken by Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders and other Partners towards tackling child poverty.
https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/downloads/file/7569/child_poverty_annual_report_2019-20
- 3.6 The Scottish Borders Local Child Poverty Report and Action Plan for 2020/21 was endorsed by the Community Planning Strategic Board in November 2020 and submitted to Scottish Government thereafter.
https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/downloads/file/7696/child_poverty_annual_report_2020-21

4 ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2018/19

- 4.1 Work undertaken to mitigate the impact of Child Poverty in the Scottish Borders in 2018/19 included:
- (i) Modern Apprentice opportunities created by Scottish Borders Council and Housing Associations.
 - (ii) Targeted support and intervention to close the poverty related attainment gap by making use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) locally where it is needed most.
 - (iii) Active promotion of free school meal entitlement, clothing grants and educational maintenance allowances to ensure children and families claim these where appropriate.
 - (iv) Early Years Pathway Project providing advice and access to benefits information through SBC's Financial Inclusion Team.
 - (v) Development of the Rapid Re-housing Transition Plan to assist those at risk of homelessness.

5 ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2019/20

- 5.1 Good progress has been made against the actions set out in the 2019/20 Action Plan. Highlights include:
- (i) Creating apprenticeships and training opportunities for young people through commissioning of new and existing home investment. Eildon Housing Association and Harts Builders working in partnership to create apprenticeships and training opportunities through the delivery of affordable housing projects. Eildon and Harts Builders have jointly funded a Community Benefits Officer.
 - (ii) Inspire Learning is a £16million 1:1 education transformation programme which Scottish Borders Council has centrally funded prior to COVID19. By March 2020 every secondary pupil had their own managed iPad to take home, by July 2020 iPads were provided to primary pupils in classes P6-P7, and by the end of 2020 all pupils in P4 and P5 had their own devices for the academic year 2020/21. This initiative has assisted greatly with the avoidance of digital exclusion and the widening of access via the provision of technology and equipment has been very well received by schools, students and their families.
 - (iii) Early Years Pathway Pilot Project – improving access to benefits information, advice & support for early years families. The advice facility at Health Centres was arranged as part of the NHS "Pathway initiative" where Midwives are encouraged to refer expectant mothers for benefit advice. Uptake of the service was slow at the outset however as

communication of the service improved so did the take up. The advisor now has regular referrals from Health Visitors, Nurses and new and expectant mothers as well as telephone and email messages requesting advice. The number of enquires during the first 6 month period totalled 39, resulting in an increase in benefits of £76,000. The majority of enquiries concerned pre-birth issues but many of the mothers involved said that they would be contacting the advisor again when the baby was born to ascertain their revised entitlement at that time. A few weeks into the project, the Scottish Social Security Area manager attended a Centre to discuss the new Scottish Best Start and Best Food grants and during that meeting they had the opportunity to help three expectant mothers to claim their grants.

6 2020/21 REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

6.1 The 2020/21 Local Child Poverty Action Report and Action Plan sets out proposed actions to tackle Child Poverty in the Scottish Borders, including actions to address the impact of Covid-19 locally. Action Plan highlights include:

- (i) A Money Worries App is being developed to signpost people to find services to help with issues such as money, housing, health and work. The App will be launched in Spring 2021.
- (ii) Successful applications have been made to the Connecting Scotland Programme by a range of partners, enabling families, care leavers and vulnerable people to get online through the provision of a device.
- (iii) Individual school plans for targeted intervention are being developed to close the poverty related attainment gap. The tailored plans enable children to gain skills in numeracy and literacy.
- (iv) Families in crisis can benefit from accessing emergency funds via routes such as Borders Children's Charity, Cash for Kids and other specific funds.
- (v) Delivery of new affordable housing during 2020/21 which benefits all families and young people in housing need.

7 METHODOLOGY AND REPORTING APPROACH

7.1 The Poverty and Inequality Commission recommendation to 'review how data and evidence is used to measure progress and ensure effective evaluation and monitoring methods are in place' (see Paragraph 3.4) has been, and continues to be considered in Child Poverty Reporting in the Scottish Borders.

7.2 Evaluation and monitoring methods continue to be strengthened and are reviewed by the Child Poverty Planning Group to ensure

that they are effective in providing an update on tackling child poverty.

- 7.3 Within the Action Plans, there is a column to indicate how the impact of each action will be assessed. This is provided by each relevant partner and is a mixture of evaluation, statistical information and local reporting.
- 7.4 Partners are invited to provide an update for the reporting period (year), and this is used to inform the CPP of progress made against each action.
- 7.5 Some actions are monitored and reported for specific purposes to other organisations e.g. Scottish Welfare Fund. Where this is the case, the same data and information is used for Child Poverty Reporting and evaluation.

8 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Financial

There are no costs attached to any of the recommendations contained in this report.

8.2 Risks and Mitigations

Risks associated with this report relate to the deepening problem of child poverty as a result of COVID-19. Families already experiencing poverty before COVID-19 are likely to face further difficulties and new families will be identified as in poverty.

The 2020/21 Report and Action Plan focus on the impact of COVID-19 to ensure that an appropriate response is made to the unprecedented challenge facing the Local Authority, Health Board and Partners.

Effective evaluation and monitoring processes are key to contributing to mitigating the risks presented.

8.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

There are no equalities issues associated with this report.

8.4 Acting Sustainably

There are no economic, social or environmental effects associated with this report.

8.5 Carbon Management

There are no effects on carbon emissions as a result of this report.

8.6 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no changes to the Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation as a result of this report.

9 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 This report is to provide information to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on the methodology and reporting approach taken towards evaluating actions of the Council and Partners in tackling Child Poverty in the Scottish Borders, therefore no consultation is required.

Approved by

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Signature

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Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Janice Robertson can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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