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## **TACKLING CHILD POVERTY**

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

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### **AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**29 June 2021**

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#### **1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report provides the Committee with an update on the actions that Scottish Borders Council and Partners are taking to tackle Child Poverty in the Scottish Borders.**
- 1.2 A previous report was presented to Audit & Scrutiny Committee on 14 January 2021 and it was requested that a further update would be provided in June 2021 in relation to:
- (a) A definition of child poverty
  - (b) A view of the key drivers for child poverty
  - (c) How Councillors could be involved in the Council's approach to tackling child poverty
  - (d) Information to be included in presentation of data in quarterly performance reports
  - (e) Whether benchmarking with local authorities within the family group could be carried out to identify any underlying issues giving rise to the difference in percentage levels of child poverty and to learn from best practice.
- 1.3 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. An Annual Progress Report for 2020/21 and a Report and Action Plan for 2021/22 were both endorsed by the Community Planning Strategic Board on 10 June 2021. Item 6 - [Agenda for Community Planning Strategic Board on Thursday, 10th June, 2021, 2.00 pm - Scottish Borders Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#) (minute to follow)
- 1.4 Both of these reports detail the actions that Scottish Borders Council and Partners are taking to alleviate child poverty in the Scottish Borders.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **2.1 I recommend that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee:**

- (a) Note the updates detailed sections 4-8 as requested by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 14 January 2021.**
- (b) Note the actions that Scottish Borders Council and Partners are taking to tackle Child Poverty in the Scottish Borders.**
- (c) Request that a Member Reference Group is established to provide input to the actions to tackle poverty and that approval of the scope and membership of the group is sought from Council as part of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan.**

### 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 preparation and implementation of the Report and Action Plans 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. The CPPG will shortly commence the planning and preparation of the 2022/23 Local Child Poverty Report and action plan.
- 3.3 The minutes of the previous Audit & Scrutiny Report requested that officers provide an update to the June Audit & Scrutiny Committee to facilitate discussion on the following:
- (a) A definition of child poverty
  - (b) A view of the key drivers for child poverty
  - (c) How Councillors could be involved in the Council's approach to tackling child poverty
  - (d) Information to be included in presentation of data in quarterly performance reports
  - (e) Whether benchmarking with local authorities within the family group could be carried out to identify any underlying issues giving rise to the difference in percentage levels of child poverty and to learn from best practice.
- 3.4 The following sections set out the requested update, including the Local Child Poverty Action Plan for 2021/22 (Appendix 1), the Scottish Borders Child Poverty Index 2020 (Appendix 2), and Evidence and Statistics about Child Poverty in the Scottish Borders (Appendix 3), and Benchmarking Data (Appendix 4).

### 4 DEFINITION OF CHILD POVERTY

- 4.1 The [Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Act 2017](#) does not specifically define 'poverty', instead it uses four income-based targets as measures.
- (i) *Relative Poverty*  
Scottish Government defines relative poverty as: "a household earning less than 60% of average UK household income **for the year (after housing costs), taking account of the size and composition of the household.**"
  - (ii) *Absolute Poverty*  
Scottish Government defines absolute poverty as a household with "less than 60% of average UK household income **for the financial year beginning 1 April 2010**"

(iii) *Low Income and Material Deprivation*

Scottish Government defines “low income and material deprivation” as “less than 70% of average UK household income for the reference year” and “material deprivation” as “when families are unable to afford three or more items out of a list of basic necessities”.

(iv) *Persistent Poverty*

Scottish Government defines persistent child poverty as where a child has lived in relative poverty for three out of the last four years. The Scottish Government target states that less than 5% of children should live in persistently-poor households by 2030.

## 5 KEY DRIVERS OF CHILD POVERTY

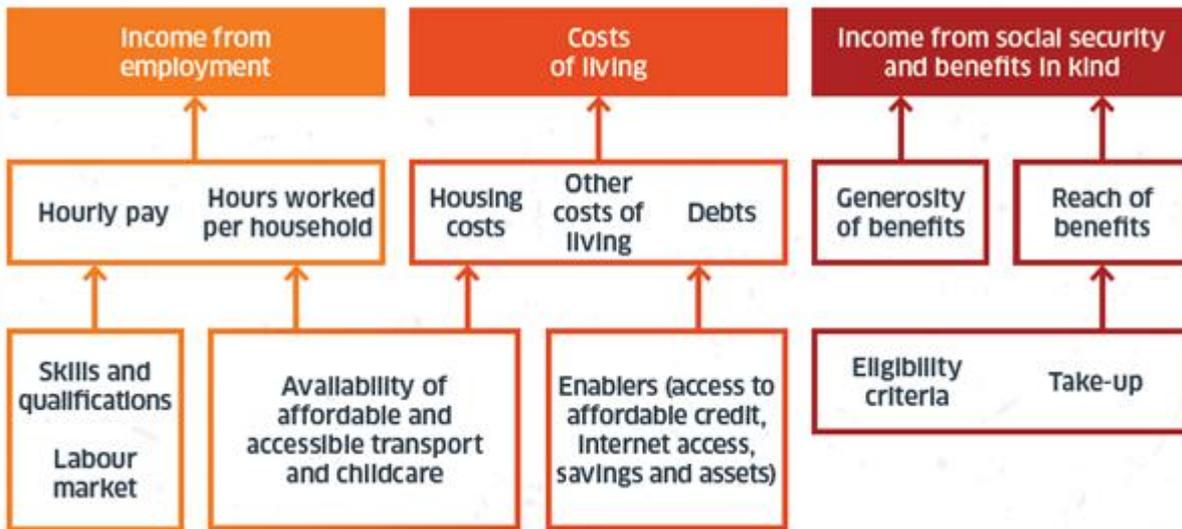
5.1 As identified by the Scottish Government’s [“Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022”](#), direct drivers of poverty fall in to three main categories:

- (a) **Employment.** Income from parents' work and earnings is insufficient to lift them from poverty.
- (b) **Household costs.** The costs of living that households have to cover are too high.
- (c) **Social Security.** Income from social security has been cut back significantly by the UK Government, particularly for families with children, and is now inadequate to lift families from poverty.

5.2 The national evidence base provides justification for the three drivers, and Scottish Government are clear about their importance, however it is also recognised that there is more to do to understand what kinds of interventions in these areas will deliver the scale and kind of impacts needed at both a national and local level.

5.3 The relationship of those drivers to wider thematic areas is summarised in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – Direct drivers of poverty



5.4 In order to meet the requirements of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, Scottish Borders Council and partners use the same direct drivers of poverty to set out and identify child poverty actions in the Borders to be undertaken through a multi-agency approach. Our Local Child Poverty Reports and Action Plans are set out in themes relating to the drivers, as we recognise the importance of using them to enable monitoring and evaluation.

5.5 In addition to the identified drivers, within the Scottish Borders, factors such as transport, educational attainment, digital connectivity and economic opportunities are also taken into account.

5.6 The Local Child Poverty Report and Action Plan for 2021/22 for the Scottish Borders was approved by the Community Planning Strategic Board on 10 June 2021, and the Action Plan is shown in Appendix 1. The Action Plan sets out a wide range of current activity that Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders and Community Planning Partners plan to deliver in 2021/22 with the aim of eradicating child poverty. These actions build on the progress made and reported in the Child Poverty Annual Progress Report for 2020/21 which shows that, despite the challenges of covid-19, children and families experiencing hardship are benefitting from the many initiatives being undertaken.

## 6 WIDER COUNCILLOR INVOLVEMENT

6.1 At the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 14 January 2021, a question was asked about whether there was scope for Councillors to be more involved in the actions to tackle child poverty. Reference was made to the Member/Officer Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group. This is a short-life working group but there may be an opportunity for further Member involvement deriving from that. Consideration will be given to this in the Anti-Poverty Strategy Report due to be presented to Council in September 2021.

## **7 PRESENTATION OF SCOTTISH BORDERS DATA**

- 7.1 Whilst there is a desire to have more regular performance reporting, most of the national data associated with child poverty is only available on an annual or bi-annual basis, and frequently time lagged. More local indicators are being explored and considered in a new approach to obtaining data which is currently in development.
- 7.2 Work has commenced on preparing and agreeing baseline information to measure aspects of child poverty in the Scottish Borders. This work is supported by the Improvement Service National Peer Network for Child Poverty, and other local authorities. Scottish Borders Council prepares a local Child Poverty Index on an annual basis using experimental statistics (see Appendix 2) and this new approach will enhance the information provided within that.
- 7.3 It is envisaged that datasets will be built which will allow us to identify various family compositions and will help in the prioritisation of those families who need the most support. The datasets will report information from existing systems such as housing benefits, universal credit claims and will also be enhanced by direct lived experience. They will also provide us with an opportunity to design a standard, consistent and smart set of measures to assist us in reporting and understanding our data.
- 7.4 Once this new approach is developed, consideration will be given as to how this could be included in the Council's Corporate Performance and Improvement Reporting. Both qualitative and quantitative data are needed to strengthen our approach to tackling child poverty, and we will ensure that direct lived experience is always taken into account. It is also hoped that benchmarking with other local authorities will be possible as a result.
- 7.5 Further evidence and statistics on child poverty within the Scottish Borders is shown in Appendix 3, and shows statistics based on the drivers of child poverty as well as the key priority groups identified in ["Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022"](#).

## **8 BENCHMARKING**

- 8.1 Scottish Borders Council participate in benchmarking activities undertaken at a national and local level. Appendix 3 sets out details of Children in Low Income Families for Scottish Borders Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council and Scotland, as well as within our Local Government Benchmarking family and at local ward level. The new approach described in paragraph 7.2 above will help us to understand the data in more detail and enable us to tackle child poverty by creating more specific actions in our Action Plans.
- 8.2 Appendix 4 also shows the indicators that are measured under the Local Government Benchmarking Framework. These indicators are indirectly linked to child poverty and show where deprivation may influence educational attainment and outcomes.

## 9 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Following the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of 14 January, this report provides an update in relation to the response requested by Audit and Scrutiny.
- 9.2 As described in paragraph 4.1 above, The [Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Act 2017](#) does not specifically define 'poverty', instead it uses four income-based targets as measures.
- 9.3 The key drivers are shown in section 5 and are set out by Scottish Government. Scottish Borders Council uses these drivers to identify actions to alleviate child poverty and the 2021/22 Action Plan sets out actions to address the challenges that children and families are experiencing as a result of both covid-19 and the wider thematics shown in Figure 1 of paragraph 5.3.
- 9.4 Wider Councillor involvement will be considered as part of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Report to Council in September 2021.
- 9.5 A new approach to producing child poverty data is being developed which will assist us in understanding our data, so that we can take specific actions to assist families in poverty.

## 10 IMPLICATIONS

### 10.1 Financial

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

### 10.2 Risk and Mitigations

There is a requirement to provide further information to Audit and Scrutiny Committee to create a fuller understanding of child poverty within the Scottish Borders, and to set out approaches for both benchmarking and consideration of wider member engagement. This report provides further clarification and information for the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

### 10.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

N/A - An integrated impact assessment (IIA) has been completed on the Child Poverty Reports for 2020/21 and 2021/22 which was presented to the Community Planning Strategic Board on 10 June 2021. The IIA is published on the Council's website.

### 10.4 Sustainable Development Goals

In considering each of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the following may be considered to make a difference:

- a) End poverty in all its forms – Local action is reported in both the 2020/21 Annual Report and the 2021/22 Report and action plan which contribute to this goal.
- b) End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition – Local action is reported in both the 2020/21 Annual Report and the 2021/22 Report and action plan which contribute to this goal. The 2020/21 Report shows progress made in areas such as cooking skills and recipe cards and reports on food poverty specifically,

whilst the 2021/22 Report contains actions planned around food security.

- c) Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages – activities are outlined in both reports which contribute to healthy lives eg. Summer holiday programmes provided by a range of partners. These programmes offer a variety of different activities including sports, culture, arts, cooking lessons, and often supply food to families to take home.
- d) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all – pupil equity funding allows schools to design programmes to close the poverty related attainment gap. Individual plans are drawn up for vulnerable children to ensure they are given the best opportunity to learn. The cost of the school day is constantly under review to ensure that trips and activities are affordable for all children. The Youth Guarantee operates to ensure that all school students applying for college are offered a suitable course to study. Other partners offer volunteering roles which build up confidence in young people so they can apply for jobs later on. Partners offer modern apprenticeship roles to young people furthest from the job market.
- e) Reduce inequalities within and among countries – poverty and exclusion are being tackled in the Scottish Borders and actions are identified in 2021/22 Child Poverty Report and action plan.
- f) Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all – housing tenants are supported with energy debt and advice is available on the best tariffs etc. Affordable homes are built and planned for tenants, and vulnerable groups are identified and supported with specific issues.
- g) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all – the Parental employability scheme provides opportunities for parents to train for roles as well as gain employment. The intensive family support service targets specific families to support them into employment.

#### **10.5 Climate Change**

There are no implications for climate change as a result of this report.

#### **10.6 Rural Proofing**

There are no rural proofing implications as a result of this report.

#### **10.7 Data Protection Impact Statement**

There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

#### **10.8 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

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

## 11 CONSULTATION

11.1 The Executive Director (Finance & Regulatory), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Service Director HR & Communications, the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

### Approved by

**Jenni Craig** **Signature .....**  
**Service Director, Customer and Communities**

**Lesley Munro** **Signature .....**  
**Service Director, Young People, Engagement and Inclusion**

### Author(s)

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**Background Papers: Child Poverty Annual Progress Report 2020/21**  
**Child Poverty Report and Action Plan 2021/22**

**Previous Minute Reference:** Audit & Scrutiny Committee 14.01.21 Item 3

**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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