



# Northumberland County Council

Families and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee  
5th July 2018

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## **Supporting Families in Poverty**

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services, Cath McEvoy

Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Wayne Daley

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### **Purpose of report.**

The Poverty Lead has been in post since August 29th 2017. The purpose of this report is to share the development thus far of the poverty strategy for Northumberland, which aims to support the Council in its broad aim to be a Council that works for everyone.

### **Recommendations**

#### **It is recommended that:**

- 1) For members to note the current work of the Poverty Lead.
- 2) For members to identify any areas that might require further scrutiny.

### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to all priorities included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021.

### **Key Issues**

1. Northumberland County Council ranks 120 of 136 in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) most deprived local authorities in England, the best performing in the North East.
2. 13.2% of the population live in one of the top 10% most deprived wards, compared to 16.9% in the region and 9.9% in England.
3. The 2011 Census measures four conditions of deprivation:

- i) Unemployment, long term sickness,
- ii) No person in household having at least level 2 qualification,
- iii) One person in household having a bad/very bad health problem,
- iv) The household is overcrowded.

- 4. In Northumberland 56% of households are affected by at least one of these conditions, and 5% affected by 3 or 4. This is lower than the regional figure of 7% and the England average of 6%.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **1. Recent Context**

- 1.1 Under the Child Poverty Act 2010 Local Authorities were required to develop a child poverty assessment or strategy to reduce relative poverty, address low income and material deprivation, and tackle persistent poverty.
- 1.2 Northumberland undertook a significant assessment to baseline the issues: The Northumberland Poverty and Worklessness Assessment. The purpose of the assessment was to inform the work of the Northumberland Strategic Partnership, and the Northumberland Families and Children's Trust, who held responsibility for the Children and Young People's Plan.
- 1.3 The assessment also led to the creation of the Northumberland Child Poverty Action Group, this has since become part of the North East Child Poverty Action Group but still holds the same aim to understand and coordinate the alleviation of Child poverty.
- 1.4 The Northumberland Strategic Partnership produced some excellent documentation around worklessness, well being and the use of local culture to universally improve Northumberland life.
- 1.5 The legacy from all of the above can be found in much of the council's work:
  - A strong focus on Early Intervention and Prevention,
  - Early Help Employment Advisor partnership,
  - Supporting Families: Our delivery of the Troubled Families model,
  - Priority implementation of Early Years provision across our most disadvantaged communities,
  - Development of employability focused pilots for families furthest from work, eg Bridge Project and Mental Health Trailblazer,
  - The Pupil Premium network advising schools on evidence based interventions for disadvantaged pupils
  - Poverty Proofing schools in partnership with Children North East,
  - Free School Meals registration drive and entitlement flag system
  - Actively supporting the Northumberland Community Bank with a focus on financial inclusion.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 The new post of Poverty Lead was created to understand poverty in Northumberland, to seek to mitigate the impact where possible, and develop a

longer term strategy that generates social mobility, positive outcomes and destinations for individuals, families, communities and beyond.

- 2.2 The poverty strategy starting point is in direct response to local need and opportunity, with steer from local, regional and national drivers all aspiring to strong and vibrant communities, connected and contributing families and individuals, and exciting futures.
- 2.3 Poverty cannot be addressed in isolation and the strength of the approach taken by Northumberland lies in commitment from colleagues, partners, the voluntary and community sector organisations (VCS), communities and others, all of whom share a vision for a safe, connected, enterprising, and well Northumberland.
- 2.4 Working together, assuring quality and sharing expertise will make Northumberland an attractive choice for opportunity and investment, in business, social action, and people.
- 2.5 In response to this mixed approach, the depth of work varies by need and context, underpinned by a *poverty strategy across strategies*, ensuring the best outcomes from resources for the County and the wider region.

### **3. Defining Poverty and its Impact**

- 3.1 Poverty is both complex and contentious, but a widely accepted definition is “Where resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities” (Townsend, 1979).
- 3.2 Exploring poverty under the limited lens of crisis, benefits and destitution will not afford the strategy, or those it serves, a purposeful destination. For this reason the report consists of the statistics that frame poverty in Northumberland, and a narrative providing a vision of direction of travel using an asset based approach.
- 3.3 The *web of poverty* (CUF, 2016) defines and usefully illustrates three broad areas of impact:
  - Poverty of Resource:  
  
“When people lack sufficient resources, such as income, skills, qualifications or health, to achieve a good standard of living. Where resources are limited, so are people’s choices and opportunities”

- Poverty of Identity:

“When people lack a strong sense of self-worth and a belief in their own ability to respond to challenges. Where these are missing, it can lead to low self-esteem, a lack of resilience and aspiration, and poor mental health”.

- Poverty of relationship:

“When people lack the strong and supportive relationships on which individual, family and community life are built, resulting in loneliness and isolation. Where relationships are under pressure or where communities are fragmented and hostile, it is difficult to thrive in human terms.

## **4. Northumberland’s Current Picture in Statistics**

### **4.1 Income**

- 13.9% of Northumberland’s workforce earn national living wage or less.
- Unemployment is higher than the national average (5.3% compared to 4.7%), and average weekly wages are lower, (£521 compared to £555).
- 4,950 children under 16 live in workless houses.
- 2,405 children, or 13%, claim free school meals (up to 40% in some schools)
- 7,535 children have a parent claiming Income Support / Job Seekers Allowance
- Fuel poverty in Northumberland ranges from 2.8% in Cramlington to 30.3% of residents in Bellingham.
- The accepted poverty threshold is a household income of less than 60% of the median income. In Northumberland 16% of children are living in “low income” families - although this varies greatly, and in some areas surprisingly, across the whole County.

### **4.2 Education and Skills**

- In 2016 9% of the population had no skills or qualifications, a further 28% have level 1 qualifications.
- 25% of residents do not possess basic digital skills.
- Parental education level is an accepted indicator of likelihood of poverty when children become adults.
- The gap in attaining 5+ GCSEs between disadvantaged pupils and others is 27%

- Northumberland ranked 288 of 324 in the Social Mobility Commission findings, in summary the commission ranks how likely disadvantaged young people are to fulfil their potential.
- 88% of Pupil Premium children leave school to a “sustained destination” such as work or college, compared to 96% of all other pupils.

### **4.3 Health**

- In Northumberland life expectancy in deprived areas is 9.6 years lower for men and 7.2 years lower for women than in less deprived areas.
- 20% of children in low income families have speech and language difficulties compared to 5-8% England average.
- Deprived wards have higher than average rate of smoking during pregnancy,
- Higher than average alcohol related hospital admissions
- Higher rate of mental health /self harm related hospital admissions,
- Lower breastfeeding rates,
- Higher rate of learning disability,
- Obesity prevalence more than double in deprived areas,
- More than 20% of health related benefits are in connection with mental health,
- Poverty and health nationally cost around £29 billion per year
- Poverty costs the UK around £78 billion per year and rising.

### **4.4 Rural Poverty**

- Northumberland is 96% rural and around half of our population live in rural postcodes.
- IMD poverty measures are weighted to understand urban populations and do not well account for rural impacts such as access to services, fuel poverty, transport and housing which can be limited, premium or inefficient. IMD mapping weights heavily to South East of the County but documenting the Northumberland context is vital.
- Opportunities for individuals, communities and all sectors can be lessened due to smaller numbers and rurality.
- Rural communities are at higher risk of digital isolation.
- Rural poverty can be masked: less likely to claim benefits and entitlements, seasonal work is more challenging to track, low wages are typical.

## **5. Asset Based Approaches**

- 5.1 In the process of understanding needs, causes and solutions, asset based approaches empower communities, consider whole social context, and focus on strengths rather than deficits. Identifying community assets such as enthusiasm, will, energy, buildings, spaces, people, knowledge and skills.
- 5.2 Communities discover a shared purpose, motivation, determination, and confidence to identify priorities and develop collective and sustainable responses.
- 5.3 Unpicking and articulating community identity generates understanding of underlying causes of inequality and dismantles barriers between groups.
- 5.4 Strong local identities emerge, building local identities, connectedness and resilience: empowered communities.
- 5.5 Asset mapping can be done on any scale, in partnership with all stakeholders, including local authority, agencies, businesses and others, but must be led by the community.
- 5.6 Measuring success requires a shift in commissioning processes and co-defining broad, meaningful outcomes that can seem difficult to evidence.
- 5.7 Innovative partnerships generate innovative and exciting ideas.

## **6. Asset Based Approaches to Addressing the Impact of Poverty in Northumberland**

- 6.1 An asset based model should be reflected in developing and mobilising staff skills and strengths, there is some good evidence of this across NCC, emphasised by the Apprenticeship Scheme, succession planning, and staff development feed the broader aspiration of this work.
- 6.2 Communities in Northumberland are often defined by strong, creative, and compassionate community contributions. Mobilising assets at a local level is already demonstrating impact on fuel poverty, reducing isolation among our older population, as well as organising local events and celebrations, and is an approach Public Health are increasingly embracing. Building on these strengths in response to need will transform lives at a local level.
- 6.3 Our present VCS support commission, Northumberland Community and Voluntary Action (Northumberland CVA), have over 200 members who vary in size, scope and style; bespoke to the communities to which they belong. There

are numerous additional groups and organisations who are not part of this formal structure, but are at the heart of a community.

- 6.4 VCS organisations and locally invested people, either residents, staff or volunteers, have ready understanding of their communities. They are best placed to co-deliver many of the outcomes we hope to achieve under our corporate plan. Working together as equals is essential, at present we have a waiting resource of service, entrepreneurs, and leadership.
- 6.5 Learning, health, advice, support, skills, fun, opportunity and culture are often found in communities with providers who are known and trusted. Working with localities to map these assets, identifying gaps and opportunities for collaborative impact via networks and partnerships gives best value and attracts investment to Northumberland.
- 6.6 Our communities, ambassadors, and VCS organisations are responsive and innovative. Ensuring we are working alongside them, sharing our own assets and resources including training opportunities, expertise, regional and national partnerships for strongest, yet broadest impact.
- 6.7 There are challenges to all stakeholders in this approach, partnerships must be built upon shared vision, trust and mutual respect, which takes time, effort and trial. Large stakeholders often must participate fully rather than lead, which is challenging to manage. But co-produced, locally grown processes and commissions offer a sustainable resource to support our aims to build resilient, healthy and strong communities.

## **7. Current Activity and Priorities**

### **7.1 Safeguarding and enriching: Investing in our relationships**

- 7.11 Building relationships and networks: Sharing information and resources with communities is fundamental to our commitment to keep residents safe. Community led activities recognise habits and trends without performance data, and can identify concern at the earliest point. They have existing relationships that can form dialogue with families in vulnerable moments.
- 7.12 Developing and supporting existing home grown provision: Youth, befriending, community food, transport, and parenting networks can highlight, intervene and support a service led relationship from that earliest point - in best cases preventing escalation either in child protection, adult safeguarding or community safety concerns.



7.13 Creating opportunities for families to feel heard: Being involved must start in their communities, feeling connected and valued encourages deeper involvement with education, learning and opportunities. Communities advocate for the needs they accurately identify and in time connect with other organisations, opportunities big and small.

7.14 As strong community identity emerges, based on heritage and strengths, communities see opportunities to build on this, and join events with common themes. These decisions enrich lives, open doors and feed aspiration.

## **7.2 Asset Based Income Maximisation: Good Information Where it is Needed**

7.21 Working to develop and embed good information and signposting where it is most needed: Including the organisations and individuals preferred by communities. Utilising and strengthening existing networks and pathways to cascade accurate information that responds to need such as benefit entitlement, free school meals, loan sharks advice, learning opportunities, via community assets Children's Social Care staff, VCS, community centres etc.

7.22 Universal Credit:

A key priority: In partnership, currently developing a suite of quality assured local area offers including mapped digital access and support, affordable credit and savings, emergency/community food provision. Articulating Northumberland's unique and evidenced challenges enables us to work with DWP and housing providers to to best smooth the claim process and throughout the duration of entitlement. These offers will be communicated across all platforms, networks and key individuals ahead of Universal Credit roll out November/December 2018.

7.23 37,000 residents will be claiming Universal Credit by 2023, including some of our most vulnerable groups, low waged families and self employed workers.

7.24 Focusing on the challenges but also the opportunities found in engaging local populations, partners and VCS: Employability and upskilling, peer learning, library footfall, intergenerational skill sharing. Building relationships over interactions and sharing learning across communities to continue to develop and respond.

7.25 Identifying need affords opportunity to attract solutions, such as digital champion opportunities, or development of a men shed!

7.26 Emerging relationships and dialogue indicate potential for a financial inclusion portal which has a mainstream aspiration.

### **7.3 Digital Assets: A Challenge Filled with Opportunity**

- 7.31 Digital inclusion is a more complicated challenge for a rural county, emerging technology offers huge opportunity for communication, education and learning, reduced isolation and access to information that address a broad range of impacts associated with poverty.
- 7.32 Digital skill and access is currently being mapped and understood at a local level, while working with colleagues and local and national partners to broaden and sharpen our offers to residents of all ages and description.
- 7.33 Digital opportunities are increasingly available and new developing partnerships with churches, village halls and other community assets offer added value such as social events, training and volunteering. Identifying space and need has opened up an opportunity to invite coding workshops into local spaces, and invite groups of our young people to regional digital events. Connecting people and organisations to form strategic partnerships between rural communities and others to benefit from these exciting opportunities.

### **7.4 Education: Everyone has Something to Offer**

- 7.41 Children from disadvantaged families do less well in education, a trend that worsens as they travel through school.
- 7.42 Working with schools in developing strategies to engage parents, communities and businesses through dialogue and shared ambition. This offers good value and is best placed for impact. Businesses and communities are keen to contribute to educating our young people, and future workforce, space is to be made to facilitate this.
- 7.43 Specifically building relationships between schools, trusted partners and our less heard groups: 30% of parents from our Pupil Premium cohort have limited literacy skills - better understanding this data as barriers to engagement is key to educational attainment, community spaces and ambassadors are a safe route for many parents.
- 7.44 There is some exceptional work around breakfast clubs, nurture rooms, homework groups, activity sessions - from mixed providers - from which we can explore new ways of working and build on success.

- 7.45 Evidence shows investing in meaningful summer provision prevents a learning gap opening over extended holidays, and quality assured provision shows evidence of closing the attainment gap.
- 7.46 Varied summer provision exists across Northumberland with our children's centres, VCS, Active Northumberland and youth service. Asset mapping this provision to develop a combined offer for this summer is more broad reaching, enriching and purposeful, and mutually supportive at a time of stress for families and organisations that engage them. Including crisis support agencies, and key school staff into the communication of the provision ensures the resource is reaching families who have greatest need. This summer there are integrated programmes in Ashington, Blyth, Hexham and Alnwick, part of a regional offer this approach places us strongly to influence and attract funding to the County.
- 7.47 Offering staff and volunteers this mixed sector experience encourages in work learning and the development of meaningful careers
- 7.48 Mixed working approaches to all of the above give unlimited opportunities for children, parents, and the workforce to see and seize opportunities - complementing a vision of careers not jobs and building a population of leaders, role models, and contributors.

## **8. In Summary**

- 8.1 Northumberland has a strong platform onto which ambitious successes can be built. The County is unquestionably stronger and laden with potential when assets are pulled together at a local level and this is being seen in growing project work.
- 8.2 Challenging well worn narratives and investing in developing and sharing accurate, meaningful information has transformational potential.
- 8.3 Taking a *poverty strategy across strategies* approach ensures visibility of the opportunities and an increased likelihood of achieving goals associated with all social and economic areas of work. Such as Early Help, Public Health, Education Challenge and the broader inclusive growth agenda.
- 8.4 Mixed and new partnerships will innovate opportunities and different ways of working together, maximise income to Northumberland and build enviable identities.

## IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

<b>Policy:</b>	
<b>Finance and value for money:</b>	
<b>Legal:</b>	
<b>Procurement:</b>	
<b>Human Resources:</b>	
<b>Property:</b>	
<b>Equalities:</b> (Impact Assessment attached)  Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Risk Assessment:</b>	
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder:</b>	
<b>Customer Considerations:</b>	
<b>Carbon Reduction:</b>	
<b>Wards:</b>	

### Report sign off

Finance Officer	
Monitoring Officer/Legal	
Human Resources	
Procurement	
I.T.	
Executive Director of Children's Services	CMc
Portfolio Holder(s)	

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