

## BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL (BMBC)

This matter is not a Key Decision within the council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan.

Report of the Executive Director  
Core Services

### SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP (TFG) REPORT ON POVERTY

#### 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To report to Cabinet the findings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) from the investigation undertaken on its behalf by the Poverty Task and Finish Group (TFG). This included considering what poverty looks like in Barnsley in terms of data and intelligence; what the key challenges are; what support services are available from the Council and other local agencies; and what are the future plans in terms of this agenda. The TFG met with a number of representatives from local agencies and highlight a number of recommendations in support of further improvement.

#### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet considers the conclusions and recommendations set out in section 6 as a result of the TFG's review of Poverty.

#### 3. Introduction/Background

- 3.1 As part of its work programme the OSC agreed to undertake a TFG investigation into Poverty in Barnsley. Given the heightened concerns regarding poverty both locally and nationally, the OSC felt it was an opportune time to undertake work in this area. The investigation sought to better understand the challenges in terms of poverty in Barnsley; to hear the views from a number of different key agencies; and consider what recommendations could be made for improvements.
- 3.2 The members of the TFG who undertook this investigation included the following: Councillor Phil Lofts (TFG Lead Member), Councillor Jeff Ennis, Councillor Annette Gollick, Councillor Daniel Griffin, Councillor Steve Hunt, Councillor Wayne Johnson, Councillor Jake Lodge, Councillor Caroline Makinson, Councillor Pauline McCarthy, Councillor Kath Mitchell, Councillor Jo Newing and Councillor May Noble.

#### 4. What the Task & Finish Group (TFG) looked at

- 4.1 Initially, the TFG met to consider the scope of the investigation. This involved discussing their key concerns around poverty in their local communities including: the introduction and impact of Universal Credit in the benefits system; in-work poverty; poor housing; lack of skills and good employment; difficulties with transport and access to employment and services; poor health; and increased use of crisis support services such as food banks.
- 4.2 The group discussed the complexities associated with poverty including the numerous factors which can contribute towards individuals and families living in poverty, what support is available and how residents can access it as well as what work on this agenda they are currently aware of. Given the breadth of the issues, the group focused on adults in poverty and support to them, suggesting that a separate investigation should consider child poverty.
- 4.3 The TFG undertook a number of 'check and challenge' sessions with officers regarding the work being carried out and future plans. This involved asking questions of them regarding their work, their involvement and partnership working with other agencies including the impact of this on Barnsley residents. This included:

- Meeting with Council representatives working in Business Improvement & Intelligence to consider what local, regional and national data is showing in terms of poverty;
- Meeting with a Reader at the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) who specialises in research on poverty, worklessness, social and spatial inequality and inclusive growth and has led projects for a range of organisations, including central government departments, local authorities and research charities;
- Meeting with the Cabinet Member and Executive Director of the Communities Directorate who have a lead strategic role for the Council on the poverty agenda;
- Undertaking a visit to Athersley Community Shop to understand the work undertaken there as well as the plans for local partner agencies coming together on the Good Food Barnsley Community Interest Company (CiC);
- Meeting with representatives from Citizen's Advice Barnsley (CAB) who could provide insight into the impact of dealing with poverty on front-line services;
- Finally, meeting with Council officers leading on the Inclusive Growth agenda to build a sustainable inclusive economy which benefits all communities.

## **5. What the Task & Finish Group found**

- 5.1 Initially, the TFG were given an overview of the data and intelligence available in relation to poverty. This presented a complex picture of the different ways in which poverty is measured and defined in various national reports; thereby creating challenges in presenting a clear picture of what poverty looks like. This is compounded by a limited amount of information available at a local ward level, not only making understanding the problems at a local level difficult, but then knowing what interventions are likely to have the greatest impact.
- 5.2 What is clear, is that measuring, defining and intervening to reduce poverty is multi-faceted and complex. This is demonstrated by the national Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) which looks at poverty over seven domains including: income deprivation; employment deprivation; education, skills & training; health deprivation & disability; crime; barriers to housing and services; and living environment. Although there is an improving picture in Barnsley on some of the 2019 IMD indicators, overall, Barnsley is ranked the 38<sup>th</sup> most deprived local authority of the 317 in England.
- 5.3 In addition to the complexities of data, there are also issues with the time-lag on the information available. Changes in government policy, including the roll-out of Universal Credit in the benefits system is relatively recent; therefore, is not yet reflected in national datasets. Similarly, the removal on the requirement for local authorities to produce a poverty needs assessment has meant that there is no current data and needs analysis of poverty in Barnsley which compiles together all the data and intelligence from local agencies who contribute to this agenda.
- 5.4 In a later session, the TFG met with a Reader from SHU who further expanded on the complexities of understanding poverty data. This included how the measure of the poverty line changes depending on median household data. Therefore, in times of recession, when most households are faring worse, the poverty line goes down and makes it look like there are less people in poverty, even though the converse is true. The Reader also drew the group's attention to the increase of people in destitution in our towns and cities. This included the complexities in supporting them out of poverty as they require a large amount of investment initially, including one to one support. This is likely to pay off in the long term but may not necessarily directly benefit the agencies who invested in them; such as A&E departments seeing a reduction in their attendances.
- 5.5 Another key challenge is the availability of affordable, good quality housing. Given that housing is a significant cost for households in poverty, the more provision of good quality, low cost housing, the better. The Reader spoke of research findings where many of those on low incomes living in poor quality rental accommodation are afraid to contact their landlord to make repairs as they fear they will see increased costs to their rent, which will in-turn make their property unaffordable to them.

- 5.6 The Reader also spoke to the group about the impact of Universal Credit. Although it was set up to make work pay, evidence is showing that this is not currently the case. Not only do people struggle to afford the clothing to dress smartly for interviews, in-work poverty is also on the increase, especially as those on zero-hours contracts don't get benefits as they're classed as being in work; however, many people don't claim benefits when they've not been called into work. Also, changing hours affects the benefits paid, which takes time to administer, often leaving people without income and seeking other means to get cash quick such as using loan sharks, which results in them being in more debt.
- 5.7 Within the area, the Reader had been involved in inclusive economy work with the Sheffield City Region (SCR). The importance of the local economy, having good quality work and training and the availability of good public transport was highlighted to the TFG, as well as the opportunity to influence local large employers such as the Council, Hospital and College in terms of their employment and recruitment practices, such as focusing on those from the most disadvantaged communities locally.
- 5.8 In meeting with the Council's Cabinet Member and Executive Director of Communities, TFG Members learned of the work being undertaken by the Council and its partners to tackle poverty, focusing on fuel poverty, food poverty and financial resilience. This included the good work being done by Area Councils and Ward Alliance to fund initiatives to support local communities, such as provision of welfare advice, cook & eat sessions as well as interventions to avoid school holiday hunger. However, some concerns were raised as to the consistency of the availability of these services depending on where you live.
- 5.9 In terms of tackling poverty, it was felt that now was the time for strategic action on this agenda, bringing together not only the Council but other organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Poverty is multi-faceted, thereby is not due to one problem and nor is there one solution; it requires trying lots of different things in different ways to try and reach people and meet their differing needs.
- 5.10 One of the key ways in which the Council is working collectively with the public, private and voluntary sectors is around the food poverty agenda and to develop the Good Food Barnsley Community interest Company (CiC). Utilising the CiC model, local agencies aim to work together to: promote the sustainable production and consumption of local food; seek ways to reduce, reuse and redistribute surplus food; support asset-based projects and focus on what we can achieve; as well as apply for additional funding pots.
- 5.11 The development of the CiC is being progressed by the leader of the local Community Shop in conjunction with the Council's Healthier Communities Team. This is a local social enterprise which brings together great value surplus food from supermarkets and personal development programmes to build stronger individuals and more confident communities. As part of the investigation, the TFG undertook a visit to Athersely Community Shop to understand the work of the Community Shop and how they are helping people to build confidence and skills to gain employment, and ultimately get out of poverty. Whilst there, the TFG met with representatives from the Council as well as charity Fare Share Yorkshire to understand the plans of the local agencies to work together as part of the CiC to develop sustainable solutions to poverty. By working together this helps to avoid local agencies competing for the same resources as well as to avoid money being wasted on the development of infrastructure for short term funded projects.
- 5.12 Those involved in the development of the CiC stressed the importance of not only the work around food, but in terms of poverty, the importance of access to good quality employment so that local people see being in work as a positive thing. The prolonged delays of moving through the benefits system can cause people to be scared of coming off benefits and moving into employment due to the delays they may experience in receiving monies. It is also important that we focus on sustainable solutions and that we take an asset-based approach to combatting poverty, focusing on what we have in communities and build on this, rather than focusing on the negatives.

- 5.13 As part of the TFG's work, they also met with a representative from Citizen's Advice Barnsley (CAB), with a focus on how this front-line organisation sees poverty in Barnsley. This included consideration of the enquiries they receive, trends in terms of this as well as any underlying causes they've identified. The group welcomed knowledge of the variety of ways in which the service could be accessed including face to face and online support as well as how those with additional needs had been supported to access CAB services.
- 5.14 In terms of poverty, CAB highlighted the increase in contact with them regarding issues with benefits, when years ago they tended to receive enquiries regarding support with debt. Also, that often issues occur in terms of individuals going through 'transitions' such as a divorce, bereavement or unemployment, where they have been used to a particular income and are no longer able to cope as they have certain expectations with regards to their standard of living which they are no longer able to maintain. It is therefore at these points when people are most likely to be in need of support services.
- 5.15 The service highlighted the return on investment where for every £1 spent on CAB provision, they deliver a return on investment of £15; which TFG Members were keen is shared and celebrated as this money is also likely to be spent in the local economy. CAB highlighted the use of support services they were aware of across the Borough from not only themselves but other local agencies delivering advice services. TFG Members did raise concerns that there was not local provision of such support services in all wards and felt that there should at least be basic provision.
- 5.16 The final meeting of the TFG was to consider the work being undertaken to ensure Barnsley has an inclusive economy, where 'growth' benefits all our communities, not just those already in work with high incomes. The Council had recently been involved in a peer review to consider their work in this area and areas of potential developments. The TFG welcomed the different services within the Council working collectively on this agenda to ensure progress in developing the economy through business, whilst recognising the need for people to be healthy to progress this agenda as well as provided with opportunities both to develop basic skills but also progress in work through training and development. The TFG highlighted the importance of both good quality adult and further education, especially given the amount of in-work poverty in Barnsley.
- 5.17 Members were keen to ensure that in terms of bringing businesses into Barnsley, that the jobs would be of a high quality, with evidence of good employment practices. Members endorsed the work being undertaken as well as highlighting the need to ensure good public transport links to them as this was a key barrier for many local people to access employment. The officers advised of a number of initiatives underway working with employers to offer skill development to their employees, opportunities to sign up to the Council's 'Well at Work' Scheme to ensure good employment practices as well as events to help widen people's knowledge of available jobs and careers, such as the range available within the NHS.
- 5.18 In terms of the work being undertaken and opportunities being made available, Members were also keen to ensure that the needs of those with disabilities are being met and they have opportunity to seek meaningful employment. The officers assured the TFG that this was a consideration and with health being a key part of the inclusive economy agenda that this was essential. Examples were given of the Council increasing its employment opportunities for those with disabilities; the aim being to be a leading local example of this good practice to other local businesses.

## **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 Throughout the investigation, the TFG members made a number of suggestions and recommendations regarding the work being undertaken as well as were able to provide an insight into how poverty was affecting their local communities. In addition to these suggestions, the TFG recommends the following:

- 6.2 **Recommendation 1: An updated Poverty Needs Assessment is undertaken for Barnsley**  
As highlighted above, data and intelligence on poverty in Barnsley at a detailed local level is limited. It would be helpful to pull together intelligence from all our local agencies at Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA), to understand poverty in Barnsley, which will also be able to reflect the impact of the implementation of the recent welfare reforms, as it will be more timely than national datasets. It would be helpful to undertake both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the intelligence including an understanding of the income generated by our local support agencies by enabling residents to access the benefits they are entitled to. Additionally, the TFG feel it would be helpful to incorporate some specific poverty measures into quarterly corporate performance reporting, so that 'poverty' remains clearly on the agenda and is not lost amongst a variety of other measures.
- 6.3 **Recommendation 2: The Council and its partners consider their contracting, employment and recruitment practices**  
The TFG are keen to ensure that the Council and its partners are exemplary employers locally: offering in-work progression such as provision of the increased use of career grades, not solely relying on qualifications; ensuring that both they and their contractors/supply chains pay the living wage and have exemplary employment practices such as offering in-work training. The TFG would also recommend that the Council and its partners place a focus on recruiting staff from our most deprived communities to support us having an inclusive economy.
- 6.4 **Recommendation 3: An All Member Information Briefing (AMIB) is held on Good Food Barnsley CiC and Area Councils/Ward Alliances support projects through this partnership working to enable delivery of sustainable solutions to poverty**  
The TFG welcome the development of Good Food Barnsley CiC and recognise the potential for agencies to work together to provide sustainable solutions to poverty. The TFG appreciate the partnership is in the early stages of development; however, feel it is important that all Members and those on Ward Alliances understand more about this work and the opportunities to fund sustainable projects through it, such as Healthy Holidays and Incredible Edible Barnsley.
- 6.5 **Recommendation 4: Additional investment is made available to provide externally procured outreach advice services to ensure basic local provision in every area**  
Given the need for advice services and the evidence of their return on investment, TFG Members felt it was essential that all wards had provision of a basic local service (not just a core service delivered in the town centre). Members were keen to ensure that support around 'transitions' is available and promoted as a method of early intervention, to avoid people getting into financial difficulties. Also, provision of education and support on how to budget over prolonged periods of unstable employment as well as transitioning from benefits to being in employment and vice versa.
- 6.6 **Recommendation 5: Given the key role effective public transport services are to the poverty agenda, the TFG requested that Members are involved in the development of transport services locally and a specific AMIB is provided in Barnsley on the outcomes of the SCR bus review**  
The TFG are cognisant of the importance of effective local transport services both to aid people in accessing employment but also to seek support services. Members welcome the SCR bus review and would like to be advised of the outcomes and implications of the recent review.
- 6.7 **Recommendation 6: The Council should identify an Executive Director and Cabinet Member Champion for Poverty to ensure it is considered in all the Council's decisions**  
Members recognise the challenge of work on the poverty agenda given it is so multi-faceted. The TFG were keen that it does not get siloed; however, felt that it is important to ensure that the poverty rhetoric is not lost within the complexity of both specific initiatives to address poverty as well as the ongoing work of the Council and its partners.
- 6.8 **Recommendation 7: The Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertakes further investigation specifically on Child Poverty as part of its future work programme**

Given the complexity of poverty, the group focused their investigation on adults in poverty and support for them. However, the TFG are aware of the prevalence and impact of child poverty, which merits specific further investigation, building on this existing work.

The TFG would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who provided information, attended meetings and assisted with the TFG's investigation; it is much appreciated.

## **7. Implications for local people / service users**

7.1 The investigation undertaken by the TFG as well as the recommendations made are in support of improving outcomes for people in Barnsley. The TFG recognises the daily challenges being faced by residents, especially given recent austerity measures and welcomes work towards a more inclusive economy.

## **8. Financial implications**

8.1 There are no specific financial implications, although in responding to the recommendations in the report, the financial implications of these would need to be fully assessed by the appropriate services responding.

## **9. Employee implications**

9.1 There are no specific employee implications, although in responding to the recommendations in the report, the employee implications of these would need to be fully assessed by the appropriate services responding.

## **10. Communications implications**

10.1 The TFG members are keen to ensure that the 'poverty' rhetoric is not lost amongst the complexity of performance measures and that it is considered in all decision making. The TFG feel it is imperative that all communities have access to local welfare support services and the availability of these is communicated.

10.2 The group also feel the AMIB on the Good Food Barnsley CiC will raise awareness of this initiative, with the hope that sustainable solutions can increasingly be commissioned across the borough by bringing support services together.

## **11. Consultations**

11.1 Consultations have taken place with: the Poverty TFG Members; OSC Members; Councillor Jenny Platts; Councillor Tim Cheetham; Councillor Jim Andrews; Councillor Alan Gardiner; Council Officers from the Communities, Place, Public Health and Core Directorates; Richard Crisp from Sheffield Hallam University; Gary Stott from Athersley Community Shop, Gareth Batty from Fare Share Yorkshire, David Andy from Citizen's Advice Barnsley; and the Council's Senior Management Team.

## **12. The Corporate Plan and the Council's Performance Management Framework**

12.1 As outlined in the Corporate Plan, the three priorities for Barnsley are: a thriving and vibrant economy, citizens achieving their potential and strong & resilient communities. Work to tackle poverty is central to achieving all of these priorities; therefore, it is essential the Council and its partner organisations work together to support these aims. As highlighted in the recommendations in the report, the TFG would like to see greater site of 'poverty' in corporate performance reporting.

## **13. Promoting equality & diversity and social inclusion**

13.1 The TFG is keen to ensure that all Council services and activities are accessible to all its communities. Throughout the TFG's involvement in this work they have specifically referred to

making sure that services are accessible to all, particularly those in our most deprived communities. The TFG raised the importance of opportunities for people with disabilities to access employment to ensure that we have a truly inclusive economy.

#### **14. Tackling Health Inequalities**

- 14.1 There are large health inequalities between Barnsley and England, and within Barnsley itself. Poverty and associated factors are recognised as wider determinants of health inequality; therefore, working to tackle poverty contributes to tackling health inequalities. The investigation undertaken by the TFG and recommendations made are in support of improving services across the borough; with recognition that additional work may be required in specific communities to help address health inequalities.

#### **15. Risk management issues**

- 15.1 The Council's Strategic Risk Register (SRR) is currently under review; therefore, the reference to specific risks is likely to change. However, it is likely the recommended activities detailed in this report will contribute further to the effective mitigation of risks associated with poverty in Barnsley, and it would be appropriate for any follow-up report to be cognisant of these risks.

#### **16. Glossary**

AMIB	All Member Information Briefing
BMBC	Barnsley Metropolitan borough Council
CAB	Citizen's Advice Barnsley
CiC	Community Interest Company
CRESR	Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research
LSOA	Lower Layer Super Output Area
OSC	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
SCR	Sheffield City Region
SHU	Sheffield Hallam University
TFG	Task and Finish Group

#### **17. Background papers and useful links**

- Poverty in the UK Statistics House of Commons Briefing Paper September 2019: <file:///C:/Users/annam/OneDrive%20-%20Barnsley%20Metropolitan%20Borough%20Council/Desktop/SN07096.pdf>
- UK Poverty 2019/20 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/file/53876/download?token=azqCkRcQ&filetype=full-report>
- Barnsley Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 2019: <https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/our-council/research-data-and-statistics/barnsley-joint-strategic-needs-assessment/>

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