

Child poverty in Surrey Heath

Summary

This report sets out the current known facts about child poverty in Surrey Heath and work being undertaken by the Council to address this issue.

Portfolio - Support & Safeguarding

Date Portfolio Holder signed off report

Wards Affected

ALL

Recommendation

The Executive is advised to RESOLVE to

- (i) note the attached report; and
- (ii) Indicate support for voluntary sector initiatives in the Borough to assist children living in poverty.

1. Resource Implications

- 1.1 There are no resource implications arising outside of the agreed budget for 2018/19.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 This report is a response to the motion put forward by Cllr Rodney Bates as follows: *"This Council notes with sadness that there are many children within the borough that are experiencing poverty including a third of all children within Old Dean. As a result, this Council requests officers bring forward a report to the Executive within the next 6 months outlining practical steps that the Council could consider in order to help address this issue in partnership with others."*
- 2.2 In working with children the Council deals with two different definitions: Children Living in Poverty and Children in Need.
 - Children Living in Poverty are defined by the government as: children living in families in receipt of out of work (means-tested) benefits or in receipt of tax credits where their reported income is less than 60 per cent of median income.
 - A Child in Need is defined under the Children Act 1989 as: a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled.

- 2.3 The published 2008 and 2015 child poverty figures for Surrey and Surrey Heath are set out below.
<https://www.surreyi.gov.uk/dataset/children-in-low-income-households>
- 2.4 Subsequently, more recent figures for September 2017, can be found on <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/>
- 2.5 What the published figures show is that between 2008 and 2015 there has been a decrease in the numbers of children classified as living in poverty, however between 2015 and 2017 there has been an increase. In 2015 within Surrey as a whole some 20,290 children were living in poverty and of these 1305 were in Surrey Heath. This is 7.3% of all children in Surrey who are living in poverty. The breakdown by ward is shown below. Households are living in poverty if their household income (adjusted to account for household size,) is less than 60% of the average. All poverty rates are calculated on a before housing costs basis.

| Ward | No of children in 2008 | No of children in 2015 | No of children in 2017 |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Bagshot | 95 | 90 | 100 |
| Bisley | 40 | 30 | 39 |
| Chobham | 100 | 70 | 86 |
| Frimley | 170 | 130 | 129 |
| Frimley Green | 55 | 60 | 58 |
| Heatherside | 55 | 55 | 82 |
| Lightwater | 60 | 35 | 57 |
| Mytchett & Deepcut | 120 | 70 | 90 |
| Old Dean | 320 | 265 | 271 |
| Parkside | 50 | 45 | 61 |
| St Michaels | 170 | 160 | 192 |
| St Pauls | 25 | 25 | 53 |
| Town | 95 | 90 | 65 |
| Watchetts | 165 | 125 | 153 |
| West End | 40 | 35 | 45 |
| Windlesham | 30 | 20 | 43 |
| Total | 1590 | 1305 | 1521 |

- 2.6 These figures are reflective of numbers across Surrey and show that child poverty in Surrey Heath is not above average. This is not, however, a reason for complacency.
- 2.7 Many children who live in poverty also fall within the definition of Children In Need with the 'abuse and neglect' being the most common reason for needing assessment within Surrey. The rate of Children In Need per 1,000 head of population in Surrey Heath is 38.3%, this is the third lowest level of need in Surrey.
- 2.8 It is noted that the recent Ofsted report for Surrey County Council once again found that Children's Services within the County were failing and

a Commissioner has been appointed to oversee the improvement plan for the County service. Surrey County Council is currently reviewing its Children's Services to address the criticisms in the Ofsted Report and districts and boroughs are awaiting the proposals to turn the service around but have made clear that they will support the County Council in its endeavours.

- 2.9 In respect of partnership working with others, much of the work around Children in Poverty is undertaken through Surrey County Council in its role as Children's Social Services Authority and Local Education Authority. The role of the Borough Council most closely touches on this issue as the Local Housing Authority where we work closely with Registered Housing Providers to meet the housing needs of both children and their families who live in poverty.
- 2.10 The Borough Council has no statutory responsibility to deal with children's issues and no statutory powers on this issue. Since 2013, however, Surrey Heath has worked in partnership with Runnymede and Surrey County Council to deliver a Family Support Service. That service addresses the issues around Children in Need and their families within the Borough, many of these are also children living in poverty. The service works with statutory and voluntary local agencies within an agreed framework to support these children and their families. That support can range from providing emergency food and clothing or funding school uniform to arranging counselling and other support for families where factors such as anti-social behaviour, substance abuse or domestic violence are present.
- 2.11 Anecdotal evidence of the impact of poverty on children in the Borough includes the following work being undertaken through the Family Support team.
- providing families with toys for children at Christmas time through 9.64 Eagle toy appeal, when families cannot afford to purchase Christmas presents. In December 2017, 34 families were provided with toys from the appeal.
 - during last winter, working with a family in Frimley, who reported that they could not afford to heat their home and purchase food and therefore then chose not to heat their house during the winter so that they could feed their children.
 - currently working with a family, living - in Mytchett & Deepcut who has recently had a baby to add to their family of 4 children under 8 years old. Prior to baby's arrival, the family had not been able to purchase anything for the new-born due to lack of finances. The service provided the family with a Moses basket and large baby pack including nappies, blankets, toiletries, feminine hygiene products and baby clothing. The baby was born the following week.
 - Within the last year the team have provided food parcels to 38 out of the 54 families they have worked with.
 - Within the last year the team has received just under £4000 in charity funding from Frimley Fuel Allotments, Surrey Border Lions Club, Buttle UK and Henry Smith Charity. This has been used

towards buying school uniform, washing machines and cookers for families who cannot afford these items.

- 2.12 One other area of support that has been discussed, is social prescribing and whether this could be used to support children in need or living in poverty into activities that might otherwise be unavailable to them where a direct emotional or physical benefit can be shown eg membership of a gym club or dance group. Until, however, the future of children's services is resolved this will not be explored any further through the Family Support Service. Currently the service applies to local charities for funding. Activities for which it has been successful in sourcing funding include gymnastic clubs, school holiday clubs. In addition they have been able to source funding to support families to visit sites run by Surrey Outdoor Learning as an alternative to traditional family therapy.

3. Options

- 3.1 The Executive is asked to Note this report and to consider whether it would support any of the proposals below.

4. Proposals

- 4.1 The Executive is asked to consider the information contained in the report, taking into account that the Council does not have any statutory duties in relation to Children's Services.
- 4.2 The Council could increase support to families with children living in poverty, for example by offering a form of discount for such families. The Council could decide to explore the possibility of offering such a discount for its services. It could also look to provide support for voluntary sector initiatives such as holiday lunch clubs which provide a hot meal for children eligible for free school meals who often go hungry during school holidays. Any increase in support would need to be fully explored and the budgetary implications identified. If considered appropriate, the Executive could appoint a Task & Finish Group to further examine the feasibility of these options.

5. Corporate Objectives And Key Priorities

- 5.1 Corporate Objective 4 to build and encourage communities where people can live happily and healthily

6. Equalities Impact

- 6.1 Poverty is not one of the protected characteristics under the equalities legislation. It is, however, clear that children who live in poverty are disadvantaged from birth and support to enable them to access good health care and education as well as basics such as adequate food, heating and clothing is vital to their well being

7. Human Rights

- 7.1 In 1991, the UK Government agreed to make sure that children have all of the rights listed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Human Rights Act 1998 applies to everyone but does not make specific provision for children.
- 7.2 The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a legally-binding international agreement setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion or abilities. The four core principles of the Convention are non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child.

8. Community Safety

- 8.1 This work supports improving community safety as this group of children are often victims of violence or other crime and conversely perpetrators of anti-social behaviour.

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| Annexes | None |
| Background Papers | None |
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