



Child Poverty in Bedfordshire

Summary Report

June 2009

Research Report

Introduction

This is a summary of the recent research undertaken for Bedfordshire's new **Child Poverty Network**. The research will help the Network (and its Task Group) in overseeing the work on the child poverty indicator (**NI 116**) that was included in the 2008 **Local Area Agreement** for Bedfordshire, and is now in the new LAAs for Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire.

The findings from the research will help set **baselines for measuring local child poverty** and will provide information that can be used in the **strategies** that are currently being developed to tackle child poverty in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire.

A full copy of the research report, which was published in May 2009, is available on the child poverty page on the TPT Group website: www.tacklingpoverty-beds.org.uk

Child Poverty in the UK

"Child poverty is the scar that demeans Britain."
Gordon Brown, Prime Minister, 1 March 2008

In 1999 the Government made a pledge to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate child poverty by 2020. It is now widely accepted that this promise will be extremely difficult to fulfil.

With regard to child poverty in the UK, the research findings show that:

- The Government uses three indicators to measure child poverty. The headline figure is the proportion of children in households below 60% of the median household income
- Child poverty costs the UK £25 billion a year
- There are 2.9 million children living in poverty in the UK. This figure increases to 4 million if housing costs are also taken into consideration
- Income inequality in the UK is growing
- The majority of children in poverty now have at least one working parent
- Some children, such as those in workless families and those in families where somebody is disabled, have a much higher risk of poverty
- The UK has one of the worst records of child poverty in the European Union
- The East of England has the lowest average rate of child poverty in the UK but there are pockets of high deprivation in the region - including in Bedfordshire

Child Poverty in Bedfordshire

The figures that the Government uses to measure child poverty are not currently available at a local level. Therefore local data for this research has been taken from other sources:

- **The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)** which measures income deprivation for families with children (under 16) in Local Super Output Areas.
- **Tax Credit data** which gives information on the number of claimants of Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit. Proxy measurements for child poverty - the proportion of children living in workless families, and the proportion of children living in low income families - can be obtained from this data. The data covers children aged 0-16 and those aged 16-19 in non-advanced education. The statistics show that almost 13,200 children (14%) live in workless families in Bedfordshire and about 28,500 children (31%) live in low income families.
- **Other local data** shows that child poverty is linked closely to under achievement at school, poor health and lower life expectancy.

Bedford Borough

- **9 Local Super Output Areas in Bedford are ranked in the top 10% in England for child poverty¹**

These LSOAs are in the wards of Castle, Harpur, Kingsbrook, Goldington, Queens Park, Cauldwell and Kempston North

- **19% of children (over 6,500 children) live in workless families²**

In the wards of Kingsbrook, Queens Park, Cauldwell and Goldington this figure rises to over 30%

- **39% of children (over 13,600) live in low income families²**

In the wards of Queens Park, Cauldwell, Kingsbrook and Goldington this figure rises to over 50%

Central Bedfordshire

- **The Local Super Output Areas with the highest child poverty in Central Bedfordshire are in the old South Bedfordshire area¹**

The wards of Manshead, Tithe Farm and Houghton Hall have LSOAs ranked in the top 20 LSOAs for child poverty in Bedfordshire

- **12% of children (over 6,600 children) live in workless families²**

In the wards of Tithe Farm, Manshead and Parkside this figure rises to over 25%

- **27% of children (over 14,900 children) live in low income families²**

In the wards of Tithe Farm, Parkside, Manshead and Northfields this figure rises to 40% or over

- **In Central Bedfordshire there are a number of pockets of hidden deprivation in the rural areas**

¹ Indices of Deprivation 2007 - Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index

² Figures published by End Child Poverty in 2008 - www.endchildpoverty.org.uk - The figures are based on the latest available Child Benefit geographical statistics (August 2006) and the latest finalised Tax Credit geographical statistics (2006/07)

How to tackle child poverty in Bedfordshire

The research also collected opinions on how to tackle child poverty in Bedfordshire.

The following quotes illustrate some of the key themes that appeared in the comments:

"Child poverty is not just about children, it is about families - and is everybody's business".

"There is a need for more collaborative working and more flexible, integrated and preventative services"

"Although Bedfordshire is generally affluent, there are pockets of high deprivation - and it is unacceptable to have even these small pockets of poverty"

"More commitment, political leadership and strategic thinking is needed on poverty issues in Bedfordshire".

"An holistic approach is needed by local councils, and key partners, to tackle child poverty - and LGR provides a great opportunity to take this forward".

Recommendations

1. The statistical information gained through this research should be used to help:

- Set local baselines to measure child poverty
- Develop strategies to tackle child poverty in Bedford and in Central Bedfordshire

2. The opinions on how to tackle child poverty, which are recorded in the report, should be taken into consideration:

(a) By the Child Poverty Network

The Child Poverty Network (and its Task Group) should continue to:

- Raise the profile of child poverty issues
- Promote the idea that even having small pockets of child poverty in Bedfordshire is unacceptable
- Stress that child poverty is everybody's business - by developing the links between partners across all the sectors affected by child poverty
- Undertake further research into the impact of poverty on local families

(b) When developing child poverty strategies

The local strategies should encourage:

- An holistic approach to tackling poverty with more collaborative working between partners
- The development of stronger links between adult and children's services
- More flexible, integrated, and preventative services

The strategies need to consider:

- Using poverty impact assessments in new policies and strategies
- Using a mixture of area based and individual based interventions - including interventions in rural areas
- Suggesting that a senior Council officer in Bedford and Central Bedfordshire is appointed to be responsible for promoting, implementing and monitoring the strategies
- How to link the strategic approach on child poverty into the wider Sustainable Community Strategies in Bedford and Central Bedfordshire

Next Steps

The above recommendations were accepted by the Child Poverty Task Group at its meeting on 20th May 2009 and the following action was planned.

- The 2009 baseline to measure local child poverty has been set as the proportion of children in low income families: 39% in Bedford and 27% in Central Bedfordshire. These figures are a proxy measurement for child poverty as official Government figures are not currently available at a local level.
- To show the real effects of poverty on families in Bedfordshire, it has been agreed to commission a documentary film into local child poverty. This film will be researched and made by Colin Skevington a local documentary film maker.
- Information is currently being collected on child poverty related projects and activities that are already taking place in Bedfordshire.
- Child Poverty Strategies for Bedford and Central Bedfordshire are currently being drafted and will be considered by the Child Poverty Task Group at its meeting on 8th July 2009