

Item 2

Child poverty

Purpose of Report

For discussion.

Summary

The Board has identified tackling child poverty as a priority. This paper sets out the current national context and suggests ways in which the LGA could work with councils to support them in improving the lives of children living in poverty.

Recommendation

Members are asked to discuss and agree the future direction of the LGA's child poverty work.

Action

Officers to take forward as directed by members.

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Background

1. The Board has previously agreed that tackling child poverty be a Board priority as part of promoting growth and prosperity. At the office-holders' meeting in December, it was agreed that this should be discussed by the full Board.
2. Under the Child Poverty Act 2010, councils and their 'delivery partners' have a legal obligation to cooperate in the bid to reduce and mitigate the effects of child poverty. The act also placed a legal obligation on government to end child poverty in the UK by 2020.
3. In May 2011, the LGA published a report from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) into councils' progress in meeting this new duty. The report recommended a number of ways in which councils could be supported in mitigating the effects of child poverty. Councils particularly called for evidence of "what works" to be shared. This has been echoed by councils in recent conversations.
4. The government is currently consulting on better measures for child poverty: moving from an income-linked to a multi-dimensional measure. The LGA is gathering feedback from councils to inform its response.

Raising awareness of child poverty issues

5. Child poverty is by its nature relevant to many of the LGA's policy areas: housing, skills, health and wellbeing, economy, transport etc. Officers could work with colleagues to raise awareness of child poverty issues in their policy area and support programmes and to maximise the LGA's impact on helping councils tackle child poverty. This is particularly timely as business planning for 2013/14 is underway and relevant programmes such as Community Budgets and the Local Growth campaign look to their second phase.

Opportunities to support the sector

6. Councils are seeking better evidence of the impact of child poverty interventions. This is a potentially huge area of work. To make the best use of LGA resources, it is suggested that the Board might like to consider a focus on improving educational attainment levels for children living in poverty. This would more strongly link tackling child poverty to the wider work on school improvement and increase its impact and visibility.

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7. A work programme in this area could take the form of researching, evaluating and sharing existing good practice (such as North Somerset's 'Join Up Join In' programme). It could also, or alternatively, support a number of councils facing challenges in this area to develop local solutions and share their learning.
8. There are pros and cons to both approaches. A retrospective, research-based programme could provide quick wins in the way of evidence but might also not reflect councils' current financial circumstances. A more comprehensive support programme would be grounded in current challenges but also carries risks of councils not succeeding in their approaches and the likelihood of a longer time before any successes can be quantified.

Financial Implications

9. Different levels of support to the sector will have different resource implications. Following the Board's steer, officers will prepare a more detailed report.