Briefing on the Child Poverty project for the Children and Young People Board
17 November 2004

For information

Background
The former Social Inclusion Executive set ‘tackling child poverty’ as one of its priorities in 2002/03, establishing the project in the autumn of 2002. The main outputs from this SI Exec project during 2003 were:

- Policy review group on tackling child poverty in April 2003
- ‘quids for kids’ benefits and tax credit take-up campaign launched in April 2003 with the publication of a good practice guide and website, followed by a national conference, quarterly newsletters, project of the month awards, and regional events
- a position paper on the local government role in tackling child poverty published in September 2003 and submitted to the Select Committee on Work and Pensions’ enquiry on child poverty
- negotiations begun with Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Treasury on agreeing an Accord for joint work on child poverty
- seminar held on December jointly with as part of their review of child poverty feeding into SR 2004

As part of the business planning process for 2004, the Child Poverty project became a corporate project and was scoped to include new and expanded elements which are discussed later in this document.

Strands of work begun by the 2003 project have continued in 2004, for example:

- Submission made to Treasury for cross-cutting review on child poverty in January
- Oral evidence given to House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee enquiry into child poverty
- Commissioning of the evaluation of ‘quids for kids’
- Continued negotiations with HMT, DWP and now DfES on the Child Poverty Accord

Objectives of project
I. to raise awareness of local government’s role in tackling child poverty, both at a strategic level but also by supporting and co-ordinating smaller projects
II. to identify the key factors necessary for moving children out of poverty as raising aspiration, and widening experience in order to enable poor children to take up the opportunities available to all children and thus maximizing their life chances
III. to share local experience, and encourage evaluation and improvement
IV. to explore how the government’s child poverty pledge is to be achieved

Member Task Group
The first meeting of the reconstituted Child Poverty project Member task group took place on 12 October. The task group agreed their terms of reference and ways of working, subject to amendments, and received papers on all the issues listed below. A further meeting is planned for December. The minutes of the task group meeting are attached for information.
Latest position on project

1. “quids for kids” evaluation
The LGA’s year long “quids for kids” campaign, launched in April 2003, was designed to encourage local authorities to run local benefits take up campaigns. It was evaluated by NOP Social and Political Researchers. They carried out a survey of local authorities and campaign organisations and identified overall perceptions of the campaign and its effectiveness. The main findings of the evaluation were:

- Just under three quarters of respondents (73%) had heard of the LGA’s “quids for kids” campaign.
- Of those who had heard of the campaign, 32% had conducted benefits and take-up work over the past year. Of this group, 58% reported that “quids for kids” helped them increase their take-up work and boost its success rate.
- The majority of respondents (62%) had used at least one of the “quids for kids” campaign resources, i.e. they had either read the Good Practice Guide, read a campaign newsletter, used the electronic toolkit applied for the “project of the month” award or attended a “quids for kids” event or participated in the November “month of action”.
- 2 in 5 (39%) of those who had used at least one “quids for kids” resource reported that the campaign had either increased their benefits and tax credits take-up activities or had helped their existing activities to succeed.
- 9 out of 10 respondents who had seen the good practice guide rated it as useful overall.
- Of those who had read the campaign newsletters, 8 out of 10 respondents agreed it was a useful resource.

The “quids for kids” element of the project has now finished but learning from it has been taken forward in a number of ways including the website information being placed on the ‘swopshop’ page of RightsNet (www.rightsnet.org.uk) and through presentations at the LGA–DWP Strategic Forum and the Child Poverty Forum meeting in October.

2. Proposed research and publication
Last year’s child poverty position paper, entitled ‘Child Poverty and Local Government’ aimed to put local government on the map in terms of tackling child poverty. The proposed research for a publication to be produced provisionally in spring 2005 moves on from this to look at specific elements of child poverty, resilience and the effect of raising aspirations to break the ‘cycle of deprivation’, and local government’s role in developing those. Effort will be made to include issues relevant to authorities with pockets of deprivation, not just the most deprived authorities.

Assuming evidence of, or the case for, a local government role can be identified, this research would primarily be aimed at national politicians, officials, national stakeholders and opinion-formers. Secondarily, the audience is local authority members and officers, and local partners.
The proposed output is an LGA report which explores the factors that protect some children in poverty from poor outcomes, and examines the role that local government can have in extending these to other children. The first stage of the research would be to commission a review, which examines the existing literature and research, on ‘raising aspirations’ and the ‘resilience factors’ that protect children on low incomes from poor outcomes. There would be a particular focus on the role of local government in this: either where factors are identified that clearly relate to local government services, or where examples or case studies of local authority projects deliberately aimed at this become apparent.

The report would draw some broad conclusions about the role of local government based on the review and, where possible, illustrate it with some case studies (either discovered during the review, or identified by LGA staff where we know of local authorities doing work in this area already).

Should stage one of the research prove successful in identifying a role for local government, a second stage could be considered. This might be one, or both, of the following:

- a more detailed examination of the case studies identified at the first stage, that results in recommendations for how local authorities’ role might be extended more generally (for lobbying purposes, our primary audience), and more practical lessons and advice that might be of use to other authorities (our secondary audience)
- a round-table discussion of academics working in this field, and a selection of councillors and senior offices, about the stage one report, and how local government can take the agenda forward.

**Timescale**

The aim would be to publish the outputs arising from this research at an event, possibly in spring 2005. Work on stage one would begin in December, after a competitive tender exercise.

The Child Poverty member task group made a number of comments about the proposed research and gave their approval for it to go ahead subject to amendments to the outline brief presented at the task group. The Research team are taking this forward in conjunction with the project leader.


**Background**

The LGA initiated a joint Child Poverty Accord with HMT and DWP in 2003. Since then, colleagues from DfES and the Inland Revenue have been engaged in the discussions and the Accord now includes DfES and the Inland Revenue.

Just as poverty itself is multi-faceted so too must be the response, which should involve not just central government, but also local government and a wide range of partner organisations working with children and their communities. The Accord therefore, sets out how the DWP and its Agencies, HMT, DfES, Inland Revenue and local authorities in England intend to work
together to tackle child poverty.

The important contribution that the Child Poverty Accord will make to joint central/local government work to tackle child poverty, was mentioned in HM Treasury’s Child Poverty Review published alongside the 2004 Spending Review White Paper.

**Latest**
The Child Poverty member task group approved the Accord earlier this year. Ministers at DWP, HMT and DfES received a submission asking for the final version of the Child Poverty Accord and action plan to be approved in the early autumn, which has just been approved by all departments. The next stage is for all departments to sign the Accord and place on their websites.

A formal launch will not take place but the LGA will publicise the Accord by sending out an alert to all local authorities and will consider all opportunities for press releases and publicity work.

Councillor Alison King, Chair of the Children and Young People Board is the LGA signatory on the Child Poverty Accord.

**Child Poverty Forum**
A joint child poverty forum has been established to take forward the work of the Accord and meets approximately every quarter to discuss specific issues identified as important in the Accord. The meetings are held under Chatham House rules to allow open discussion of problems but more importantly solutions. The first meeting was held in January and focused on general issues relating to the Child Poverty Accord and its objectives and the second meeting held in July discussed improving educational opportunities for poor children. This meeting was hosted by HMT and was well attended, including a number of academics as well as representatives from all of the Accord partners.

Following the forum meeting, discussions are continuing with government officials about raising the educational outcomes of poor children. This will include an alert to local authorities asking for specific information on the activities they are undertaking to tackle child poverty, focusing on raising educational achievement which has been sent out. The rest of the findings will be used in the LGA’s ongoing lobbying of government about the contribution local authorities are making to tackling child poverty.
The third meeting of the child poverty forum took place on 14 October, on the subject of promoting take-up of benefits and tax credits. One of the objectives set out in the Accord is to work together to support the take-up of entitlements to tax credits and benefits by poor families, and work to remove any barriers impeding take-up. For this meeting presentations and discussion focused on the barriers to take-up, learning from existing examples of good practice and coming up with practical recommendations for supporting and extending take-up work which can be implemented. Learning from the “quids for kids” work undertaken by local authorities formed a key part of this meeting.

Michael Richardson, Director for Work, Welfare and Poverty at the Department for Work and Pensions chaired this meeting which was organised by and hosted at the LGA. Attendees included representatives from the Accord partners, the “quids for kids” steering group and representatives from other government departments.

The ‘core group’ representing all Accord partners, will meet shortly to discuss how to take forward the recommendations arising out of the forum.

4. Briefing on Disabled Children and Poverty

Over the past two years the LGA has received a body of evidence from local authorities about problems faced by the families of disabled children with the tax credits and benefits system. This has been prompted in large part by the LGA’s “quids for kids” take-up campaign for tax credits and benefits which included disabled children as one of its target groups.

Baroness Hollis, Minister for Children and the Family, at the Department for Work and Pensions, when launching the “quids for kids” campaign at a national conference in May 2003 was questioned on a number of issues around disabled children. These issues were returned to at the London regional “quids for kids” conference a year later. Baroness Hollis invited the LGA to provide her with more information and a briefing has been produced, bringing together the issues reported to the LGA by local authorities with some suggestions for reform.

The paper highlights problems and suggests both operational and policy changes needed to improve delivery of support to these families, through tax credits and benefits. These recommendations affect Job Centre Plus and the Inland Revenue, as well as health, education and social support services. It has been sent to Baroness Hollis and officials in DWP and HMT. The LGA has requested a meeting with Baroness Hollis and a cross-party delegation of members from the Child Poverty task group. Councillor Diane Packham will also attend this meeting, in a non-political capacity (subject to discussions with the political group offices) as she played a key role in drafting this briefing as a member of former Social Inclusion Executive and former member of the Child Poverty task group. The LGA will be lobbying for the recommendations to the implemented by government at this meeting and in meetings at official level.

The briefing is attached for information.
5. Child Poverty workshop at the ADSS/LGA Social Services Conference

The workshop titled ‘Eradicating child poverty - the local authority contribution’ took place on Thursday 21 October. The workshop was designed to inform delegates about how the government’s pledge to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020 will be achieved. The specific focus was on the role local authorities can play in this. Councillor Daniel Smy, from the LGA Child Poverty Member task group chaired the session.

Julia Sweeney, Head of Family, Poverty and Employment in the Working Age, Children and Disabled People Group at the Department for Work and Pensions spoke about the government’s strategy for achieving this pledge and the work of the joint Child Poverty Accord. Jonathan Stearn, Director of the End Child Poverty coalition, spoke about the work of End Child Poverty. He also described the contribution local authorities can and do make to tackling child poverty including supporting people into jobs, promoting take up of benefits and tax credits and debt advice, and highlighted the wider strategic role local government including community leadership, service delivery and as employers. Jonathan illustrated the plight of families living in poverty and the contribution local authorities can make through a real life case study highlighting the key ways out of poverty.

6. Other elements of the project

The LGA had a significant input into HMT’s Child Poverty review. The review acknowledges the ‘crucial role played by local authorities’ in tackling child poverty and highlights the need for continued collaboration with local government to achieve the aim of reducing and then eradicating child poverty.

The LGA also commented on a draft chapter of DWP’s Opportunity for All, with many of our suggestions taken on board. This draft was shared with us as a result of relationships built through the ongoing work of the Child Poverty Accord. Opportunity for All was published in September.

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