

DUDLEY HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

Agenda Item no. 9

DATE 5th December 2018

TITLE OF REPORT Reducing the Impact of Poverty in Dudley. Project initiation proposal

Purpose of the report

The Board will be well aware that one of the 3 strategic goals in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-22 is to reduce the impact of poverty across the Borough. This report proposes the establishment of a multi-agency project to establish and address some of the causes of poverty in Dudley.

Background

A poverty baseline analysis for the Borough has been completed by Dudley Council's People Directorate Intelligence Team. An executive summary of the full document is attached as appendix 1 to this report. The full baseline report is available on – www.allaboutdudley. The analysis shows that there are significant levels of poverty in Dudley. Dudley's position against most indicators of poverty, or the factors that most influence poverty levels, show that the extent of poverty is lower in Dudley than in the West Midlands region as a whole, but is higher than the national average. Poverty is also not evenly spread across the borough, but is concentrated in the central and eastern parts of the Borough.

The Board has already recognised the impact that poverty has on people's health and wellbeing through identifying reducing the impact of poverty on health and wellbeing as one of its 3 strategic priorities. Clearly, achieving this is a huge task and to make a positive impact will take time. Many of the ways that poverty impacts on health and wellbeing are driven by the national economy and by central government policy. The effect that local agencies can have is more limited but nonetheless there is a range of actions that are already being taken locally and more that might be done to increase resilience to the impact that poverty has on health and wellbeing.

The root causes of poverty are greatly influenced by national government policy, economic and societal factors, thus there is a limit to what can realistically be achieved at a local level. The baseline analysis suggests that at a local level, there are 3 main areas on which to focus to prevent and reduce the impact of poverty on health and wellbeing. These are:

- Maximising household income; minimising outgoings- with the aim to reduce absolute and relative poverty by raising housing income and ensuring that everyone can benefit from growth and regeneration- through inclusive growth approaches
- Building community resilience with the aim increase resilience to the effect that poverty has on health and wellbeing, through community outcomes, such as a sense of purpose, autonomy, community connections, a sense of pride in the neighbourhood, good relationships and continually learning and developing skills .

- Tackling child poverty with the aim to improve the life chances of children in poverty compared to children not living in poverty, with a particular focus on improving the education and skills gap.

There are a number of agencies across the borough, public, voluntary and community, and private, already actively working to help those in poverty and a range of resources to give support and information. There are many different projects and sources of help for different client groups. Whilst there are links made between some of these assets, there is likely to be scope both for better coordination and joint working, and for a better understanding of their contribution towards reducing the impact of poverty.

The work of many agencies has an impact on poverty even if this is not their primary goal e.g. schools and colleges aim to improve educational attainment but this in turn, gives their students better employment prospects thus impacting on poverty.

Further scoping to fully understand the current picture is required but a preliminary review of this non exhaustive picture, does demonstrate clearly that, in order to be most effective, work to reduce the impact of poverty has to be conducted on a partnership basis across the Borough.

Partners in the borough have recently launched the Forging the Future Vision for 2030. Work that will be progressed to achieve that vision should positively contribute to preventing and reducing the impact of poverty in the borough ensuring that there is a specific focus on preventing and reducing the impact of poverty in projects contributing to the vision e.g. inclusive growth programmes will help.

Opportunities should also be taken to link with wider initiatives or with changes in Government policy. Examples might include:

- Dudley is working with the West Midlands Combined Authority on an inclusive growth corridor which aims to ensure that investment along the Brierley Hill Metro Extension benefits the disadvantaged communities along the route
- Regionally, the West Midlands Combined Authority have a number of projects aimed at increasing employment opportunities for people across the region. More information is on their website <https://www.wmca.org.uk/>
- The Financial Guidance and Claims Act 2018 will underpin the creation of a new publicly-funded debt advice, pensions and money guidance body, which will replace the three existing statutory bodies with similar functions: the Money Advice Service, the Pensions Advisory Service and Pension Wise.
- The Government has stated in its response to the call for evidence regarding a “breathing space scheme” that it intends to lay regulations to establish a scheme during 2019. A breathing space scheme would give someone in serious problem debt the right to legal protections from their creditors for up to 6 weeks in order for them to receive debt advice and enter into a sustainable debt solution. The scheme could also create a statutory debt repayment plan.

Recommendations

1. It is proposed that during January to March 2019, an engagement plan is delivered. The purpose of the engagement will be:
 - to understand better the assets in the borough that can contribute to mitigating the impact of poverty on health and wellbeing.
 - to identify what agencies feel could be done better or differently locally in order to reduce the impact of poverty; and
 - to begin to draw together some initial priority actions for each of the 3 areas outlined above. This may involve a number of small events and one-to-one conversations, including community engagement.
 - To identify some early wins to reduce the impact of poverty, for example a “P card” to address period poverty.
2. It is proposed that a project task group, chaired by the Public Health Manager (Healthy work and economy) is established that reports to the Board via the Safe and Sound Board who are sponsoring this strategic goal.

Key asks of the Board/wider system

Initial commitment required from the Health and Wellbeing Board

The project is anticipated to be a long term multi agency project throughout the life of the health and wellbeing strategy. Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to actively engage in the delivery and development of the project by:

1. Committing/prioritising relevant officer time to tasks agreed under the project;
2. Commit to funding/Resourcing (where agreed) e.g. venue provision; website/advertising of engagement events;
3. Taking part in the engagement activities during January to March 2019;
4. Healthwatch and DCVS to develop community engagement events.

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