



## Child poverty

### Key messages

Elements of an effective whole-area anti-child poverty strategy include:

- **Effective multi-agency partnerships** – local authorities and their partners need to overcome barriers to partnership working to meet the requirements of the Child Poverty Bill. Solutions include having a shared, agreed vision, strong leadership and clear terminology from the outset as well as trust and openness and some degree of autonomy for individual partners.
- **Sufficient resources** – long-term, sustainable and appropriate levels of funding are crucial. There must also be sufficient capacity – at least two years should be allowed for the development phase (activity can take place alongside the development of the strategy), with an ongoing resource commitment for implementation of the strategy.
- **Maximisation of family income** – a mixed economy of provision is required, which can help the workless into work, help those in work to progress, and financially support those unable to work.
- **Active participation of children, young people and families** – as key stakeholders, these groups must be included in the development of a vision and strategy. Attention needs to be given to language used, the structure of meetings, communication channels and training needs.
- **A focus on narrowing outcome gaps for children living in poverty** – two effective approaches are: developing parenting skills early (children whose parents are interested in their development achieve more in school) and targeting funding at schools in deprived areas (Excellence in Cities, for example, had most impact in challenging areas).
- **Differentiation** – targeting resources differentially can be beneficial. Sometimes a people-focused approach may be more beneficial than a place-based focus. Poverty can be rural as well as urban. Also, certain groups of young people may require specific attention (young parents, care leavers or traveller children, for example).
- **Monitoring and evaluation** – outcomes for children and families should be prioritised above processes. Both national and local indicators can be used to monitor progress. Monitoring and assessment are most effective when they form part of a development cycle (target setting, monitoring (using indicators), evaluating and reviewing).

This research review tells us what works in tackling child poverty through whole-area strategies. It is based on a rapid review of the research literature involving systematic searching and analysis of key data. It summarises the best available evidence that will help service providers to improve services and, ultimately, outcomes for children, young people and their families. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) carried out this review on behalf of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO).

## Who are the key stakeholders?

Key stakeholders identified in the literature include:

- children and families living in poverty
- communities
- local authorities (LAs)
- statutory partners (for example, the police service, primary care trusts (PCTs)) and members of local strategic partnerships (LSPs)
- third sector partners (for example, voluntary and charitable partners, housing associations, non-governmental organisations)
- the private sector (for example, banks, retailers, employers).

## Their contributions are valuable in the process of improvement

- **Children and families living in poverty** should participate in activities to shape policy and development. It is important to achieve a representative cross-section, rather than drawing on an elite, or 'tokenistic' group. Services should focus on poor families with young children, in order to develop positive parenting, which can improve outcomes for young people later in life.
- **Community participation** in decision-making can be encouraged by ensuring that: meetings are informal and that professional skills or understanding are not required for participation; there is some form of facilitation or brokerage between community members and service providers; responsibilities are well distributed; and there is a good channel for recognising 'grass roots' ideas.
- **Local authorities** need to act as a broker between central government and other statutory and third-sector partners. They also need to link anti-poverty strategy with other LA policies such as Community, Economic or Sustainable Development and Neighbourhood Renewal. LAs also have responsibility for ensuring that services commissioned to the voluntary sector deliver objectives and reflect best value.
- **Statutory partners** such as the police service and PCTs must be involved in whole-area partnerships such as Children's Trusts and LSPs. Strategies are needed to overcome barriers to working across different geographical boundaries and to achieve effective budget pooling. If practitioners can be helped to see how poverty impacts upon their roles (for example, poverty can be a cause of ill health), there is a better chance of all agencies taking shared responsibility.
- **Third-sector partners** can be highly flexible and effective in meeting goals to achieve positive outcomes for young people. Their involvement in whole-area partnerships needs to be harnessed, although it is recognised that pooling budgets, particularly where agencies are small, can be a challenge. Expectations about relative authority within partnerships also need to be managed.
- **The private sector** has a key role to play in maximising income and lifting families, and communities, out of poverty. It is important for private sector representatives to be involved in whole-area partnerships in order to attract local investment into areas of deprivation, promote retail service in deprived areas, develop networks with the local labour market, ensure that training provision matches needs and provide into-employment work tasters and placements.

“ We believe that we can, and we must, eradicate child poverty and we will continue to do all we can to achieve this goal. ”

**Ending child poverty: everybody's business (HMT/DWP/DCSF, March 2008).**



## The evidence base

This review is based on 32 key items, mainly from England or the UK. Most of the items (21) were empirical research papers, but we also included conceptual pieces, good practice guides, toolkits and one policy document. While the available evidence provided a good basis for assessing best approaches to developing a whole-area child poverty strategy, there were also certain limitations. These relate to:

- **focus of the evidence base.** Missing from the evidence base at present is a sufficient focus on economic models for development and sustainability. Also lacking are items focused on intergenerational poverty, strategic interventions for particular age bands of children and the needs of specific groups of children (disabled children, for example) and their families. Although there is much literature relating to the benefits of partnership working, very little of it focuses specifically on the approaches required in anti-child poverty partnerships.
- **relative 'newness' of child poverty policy.** Given that it is less than five years since the introduction of the Child Poverty Review in 2004 with its long-term goal of eradicating child poverty, not enough time has yet passed to see many published studies about child-poverty strategy at the whole-area level. Although earlier evidence is helpful, the closer the evidence is to current models of service delivery the more relevant it is likely to be.
- **nature of the evidence base.** While policy reviews are important in encouraging a climate of critique and challenge, items of this nature may not be as rigorous as some empirically-based studies.

## Research review methods

Research literature was identified through systematic searches of relevant databases and websites recommendations from our Thematic Advisory Group, and consideration of studies cited in identified literature ('reference harvesting').

The review team used a 'best-evidence' approach to systematically select literature of the greatest relevance and quality to include in the review. This approach attempts to eliminate bias in the selection of literature, to ensure that the review's findings are as objective as possible. 1,203 items were initially screened for inclusion, of which 459 were selected and fully coded. The team chose the 32 most relevant and high-quality documents to be included in the review.

## Next steps

An updated version of this review is due to be published in spring 2010. This will include additionally identified literature, validated local practice examples, and views from stakeholder panels: children and young people; parents and carers; and service providers.

The full child poverty review is available on the C4EO website. Local decision-makers and commissioners working in local authorities or as part of LSPs and Children's Trusts may also find it helpful to read the directors' summary which is also available on the C4EO website.

C4EO is using the main messages from the child poverty review to underpin its knowledge sharing and capacity building work with LSPs and Children's Trusts, and through them the full range of professions and agencies working with children and young people living in poverty and their families.

## Research summaries

This summary is a concise and accessible overview of the key messages from the research review on this topic.

Please go to [www.c4eo.org.uk](http://www.c4eo.org.uk) to download full and in-depth versions.

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