

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Poverty Working Panel held Online via the Zoom app. on 11 November 2020

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.15 pm

9 Declarations of Interest

Minute 13 Poverty Strategy Summary and Poverty Plan on a Page - John Golding.
Councillor Mike Allen, Personal, Member of a Church which runs a foodbank.

10 Minutes of previous meeting held on 12 October 2020

Regarding the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 October 2020, it was agreed that the list of priorities [minute 2 on page 1] should include the following:

- Raising skills and employment

Subject to this amendment, the minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.

11 Joseph Rowntree Foundation - UK Annual Report on Poverty 2019/20 - Discussion

John Golding, Strategic Lead for Housing, Health & Environment introduced the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) Report and noted that, in addition, the Resolution Foundation and the Bristol Poverty Institute had good resources on poverty that the panel could draw on going forward to support its work and objectives.

The JRF report identified that some 13 million people were in poverty in the UK and offered some high level solutions to the national problem:

- As many people in good jobs as possible
- Improving earnings of low income working families
- Strengthening the benefits system
- Improving access to low cost affordable housing

The report was useful for setting the context for the Panel's work and the full report was available on the JRF website [www.josephrowntree.org.uk].

Discussion included the following points:

- The Terms of Reference for the Working Panel included the widely used definitions of poverty related to a percentage (60%) of the median level of income in the UK in any year. This definition was also used by the JRF (reproduced below)

Defining poverty

There is more than one definition of poverty and it can mean different things to different people, but it is generally considered that someone is in poverty when they are not able to heat their home, pay their rent, pay for food or buy the essentials for their children. There are 4 levels of poverty (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2019):

- **Income at minimum income standard or better** – able to afford a decent standard of living
- **Income below minimum income standard** – getting by day-to-day but under pressure, difficult to manage unexpected costs and events
- **Not enough income** – falling substantially short of a decent standard of living, high chance of not meeting needs
- **Destitute** – can't afford to eat, keep clean and stay warm and dry

Poverty is most commonly measured using either:

- People in relative low income – living in households with income below 60% of the median in that year;
 - People in absolute low income – living in households with income below 60% of (inflation adjusted) median income in some base year, usually 2010/11.
- The work of the Panel should focus on the objective of increasing the amount of low cost housing and enabling people to pay their rent and heat their home, as these were issues which EDDC could influence
 - EDDC was among the top performing Council's regarding processing claims for housing benefit. Most new claims were now coming through the Universal Credit process which had a built in four week delay before payment was made due to the assessment process
 - The Covid-19 pandemic had resulted in significant changes in people's circumstances and triggered new benefit claims which would now be dealt with under Universal Credit for working age people, rather than under the previous legacy benefits, such as housing benefit
 - There were currently just under 4,500 households waiting for affordable housing in the district and this figure tended to remain consistent over the past few years
 - The Panel should note poverty among the elderly caused by gender inequality of pay and, where appropriate, should lobby for this to be addressed
 - EDDC bid for the Government revenue grant to assist rough sleepers over the winter and allocations were expected to be announced shortly
 - EDDC works with a partnership manager at the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and links with Citizens Advice (CA) to co-ordinate and align work with them
 - The Council also works with support co-ordinators in schools to identify cases where EDDC can provide additional support
 - There are links with Devon County Council regarding food poverty, growing links with food banks and EDDC has a variety of partnerships with organisations concerning the economic development and public health agendas
 - The Chair would follow up the query as to why the Panel was not open to the public

12 **Joseph Rowntree Foundation - Poverty Strategy - Discussion on its recommendations**

The purpose of the item was to consider the various recommendations in the JRF Poverty Strategy, focussing on those relating to national and local government, service providers and housing providers, and citizens and communities. In respect of the three categories, the Panel considered whether the recommendations were positive in relation to tackling poverty and could be reflected in the EDDC Poverty Strategy.

Discussion highlighted the following points:

- In summary, the JRF Poverty Strategy document identified nine problem areas – high housing and childcare costs, living with disability, high rents and evictions from private tenancies, cost of utilities, discrimination against disabilities and racism, mental health conditions, homelessness, experiences of violence and geography
- The Team Devon approach to improving incomes, skills and businesses could be included when considering what is meant by a sustainable economy or a better economy
- The ‘Doughnut Economics’ approach captures the same points and includes moving to a low carbon economy as well as social progress
- It was agreed that future meetings would consider such issues in more depth with presentations by officers on their specific areas of responsibility
- Apprenticeships could be considered as a means of support and training for new skills, e.g. Countryside apprenticeships. The Panel noted the Kickstart programme as a means of helping people into full time employment and consideration was being given across the Council to providing placements for the programme
- It was noted that there were hidden aspects of poverty, such as personal indebtedness, which can result in crisis when people’s circumstances change. The Council has limited influence in this area, but works to support people with advice on personal budgeting
- There was an on-going problem with loan sharks which would be addressed through building the financial resilience of families and help with budgeting as key themes in the emerging Poverty Strategy
- Five strategic objectives had been proposed, with Service Leads identified to work on specific objectives. Panel members could liaise with individual Service Leads on a particular objective in which they were interested or had specific skills. The Panel could consider each strategic objective in turn at future meetings
- It would assist the Panel to know which strategic objectives included a statutory duty of the Council
- There was also an issue around helping hard to reach people or those who choose to keep their poverty hidden behind a ‘rural idyll’ and may not come forward for support
- There needs to be a ‘no wrong door’ approach for those who do seek help
- The Council was working towards removing unintended barriers for those accessing help and support e.g. One step data capture and information sharing between agencies, subject to the individual’s agreement
- Early intervention was crucial in preventing a crisis following a change to an individual’s circumstances
- The Panel noted the comments submitted by email from Cllr Paul Jarvis who was unable to attend the meeting

13 **Poverty Strategy Summary and Poverty Plan on a Page - John Golding**

John Golding introduced the Poverty Strategy Summary and Poverty Plan on a Page which set out five strategic objectives and identified Service Leads for each objective. Ultimately it was proposed that the five objectives would come together into one seamless strategy.

The Panel agreed the five strategic objectives:

- 1 Helping people on low incomes to maximise their household income and minimise their costs, building financial resilience and reducing indebtedness. Lead Service – Finance.
- 2 Strengthening families and communities, including supporting groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty, and community and voluntary groups working to combat poverty. Lead Service – Housing.
- 3 Promoting an inclusive economy, by raising skills and improving access to a range of employment opportunities for people on low incomes. Lead Service – Growth, Development & Prosperity.
- 4 Addressing the high cost of housing, improving housing conditions, creating affordable warmth and reducing homelessness. Lead Service – Housing.
- 5 Improving health outcomes for people on low incomes, including access to good diet, health care and ill health prevention. Lead Service – Environmental Health.

It was suggested that the issue of hidden rural poverty could be addressed by a communications plan to stand alongside the strategic objectives.

The following points were discussed:

- It was crucial to have a mechanism to provide immediate help for those who suddenly found themselves in crisis
- There was a need to link services with other agencies to provide rapid help
- Libby Jarrett would contact Citizens Advice to provide an update on their capacity to handle requests for help during the current pandemic
- The EDDC app could be a means of providing information for those who needed help

14 **Free School Meals during the Christmas holiday? - Libby Jarrett**

Libby Jarrett provided an update on the recent Government announcement that £117 million would be made available nationally to support those most in need. Devon County Council would receive £2 million of the funding. 80% of the funding was ring-fenced for food, energy and water costs and 80% ring-fenced to support families with children.

The Council had started to make contact with school co-ordinators who would be aware of potentially vulnerable and struggling families. It was vital to engage with families to encourage them to access support as some were not coming forward for various reasons.

At this stage it was not clear whether the funding would be administered entirely by Devon County Council or whether district councils would also be involved.

It was noted that 1,950 children in East Devon were in receipt of free school meals (10.5% of school children).

Helen Wharam advised that she had been working with Service Leads to ensure that public health and well-being matters were incorporated into service plans for next year. Consideration should be given to supporting community groups which were finding it hard to sustain efforts to help people during the prolonged pandemic restrictions.

15 **Dates of meetings and invitations to DWP / CA?**

It was proposed to hold future meetings monthly on Mondays. Suggested dates were:

- 7 December
- 18 January
- 15 February
- 15 March
- 12 April
- 10 May

It was agreed to enquire as to the level of increase of domestic violence / abuse as a result of the pandemic. The housing options team would be requested to contact the Exeter Refuge to enquire whether they needed assistance.

Libby Jarrett would check the availability of DWP and CA to attend meetings in the new year. All Members would be invited to attend.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

- M Allen
- M Armstrong (Chair)
- M Chapman
- B De Saram
- S Hawkins
- F King
- M Rixson

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

- I Hall

Officers in attendance:

- John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
- Susan Howl, Democratic Services Manager
- Libby Jarrett, Service Lead Revenues and Benefits
- Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
- Helen Wharam, Public Health Project Officer
- Andrew Wood, Service Lead - Growth Development and Prosperity

Councillor apologies:

- P Jarvis