



Report

Date: 31st October 2023

To: Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Report Title: Child Poverty in Doncaster

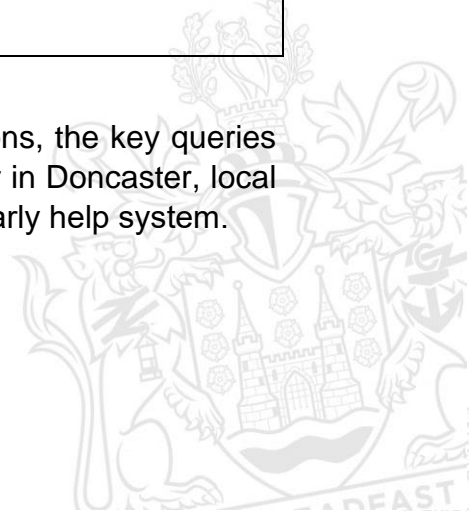
Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision?
Cllr Lani-Mae Ball; Portfolio Lead for Education, Skills & Young People	All	No

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. As requested by the Chair of the Committee, members were invited to visit our Family Hub and Your Place teams in Adwick and Woodlands. This was part of an in-person investigation around the causes and impact of child poverty and how our prevention and early intervention offer work with and in our communities to mitigate these issues.
2. Visit took place on Wednesday 20th September 2023 where members had the opportunity to speak with partners, professionals (under the Family Hub umbrella of services), charities, and families within the area which included:

Parenting and Family Support	Bentley Community Money Advice (Bentley CMA)
Early Help Pathway Lead	Need a Nana volunteer
Early Years Inclusion Team	All Saints Foodbank
Counselling	Woodlands Primary Academy
Early Years Officers	Department of Work and Pensions Advisor
Stronger Communities Officers	Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities Volunteers (EPEC)
Family Group Conferencing (FGC)	Citizens Advice
Midwifery	Lifeline Against the Breadline
Well Doncaster (Public Health)	NHS (Health Colleagues)
Tenants and Residents Association (TARA)	Green Gables (Housing)

3. This report will explore the main themes of those conversations, the key queries from members of the Committee, and set out the current offer in Doncaster, local and national policy drivers, and future plans for Doncaster's early help system.



4. Members were very positive in their feedback about what is currently being done in Local and Early Help services to support families around poverty. There were no specific questions from members at the end of the session. Therefore, the report will focus on what the offer is, to ensure members that weren't able to attend, are able to see the offer and then have the opportunity to ask any questions.
5. The report is supported by a presentation that will be the focus of the session. This presentation includes video testimonials from residents, which help tell the story.

EXEMPT REPORT

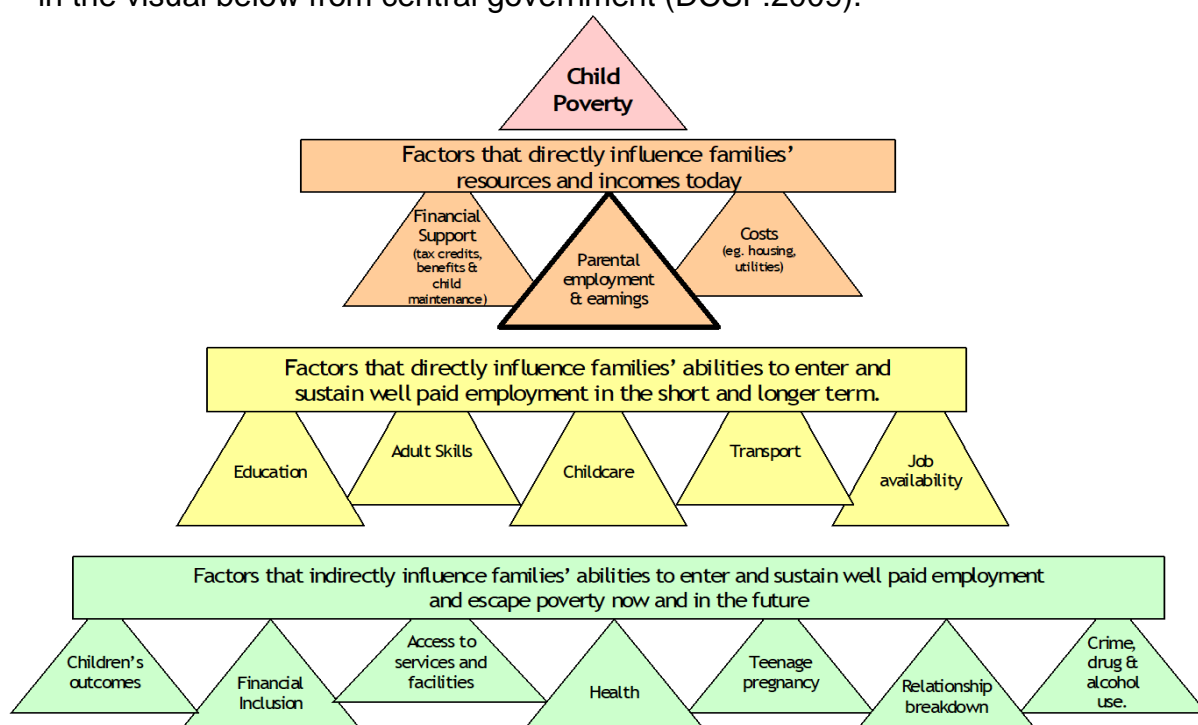
6. There are no exemptions

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. It is recommended that members of the committee.
 - a. Note the content of the report and associated presentation.
 - b. Note that the visit from members was positive, providing lots of opportunities for discussion with residents and practitioners, to help understand the challenges and services provided.
 - c. Champion the work of our Early Help system, Family Hubs, and Your Place teams

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

8. It is well-reported that nationally there is a “cost-of-living crisis” which is having notable socio-economic impacts on communities across the country; Doncaster and its residents are not immune from this. This crisis is both creating and exacerbating pre-existing need and vulnerabilities; the correlation between the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and child poverty is undeniable with more and more families experiencing the effects.
9. Poverty, and particularly for the focus of this report child poverty, needs to be understood as an all-encompassing set of circumstances and pressures that impact all aspects of families lives. This is proven academically and can be seen in the visual below from central government (DCSF:2009).



10. Doncaster's early help system means that residents have access to support aimed at mitigating or addressing these issues. This is accessible via our Family Hubs and Your Place teams where families can walk in and request support or discuss additional worries or needs during universal service provision like our stay and play sessions.
11. Furthermore, should our residents have a higher level of need and consent to further support, our early help pathway is designed to offer holistic support to families with staff from across the partnership with different skills and experiences able to contribute to that support.
12. Given the current circumstances and the direction of national and local policy on this matter, residents of Doncaster should be assured that we are committed to this way of working and will continue to strive to offer early intervention and prevention services across the City.

BACKGROUND

13. Early help is, as set out by the Supporting Families Unit, "the total support that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse". As such, our early help offer is designed to ensure that citizens of Doncaster have access to high quality supportive services that are designed to improve resilience and support them to overcome challenges before they reach crisis point or require statutory intervention.
14. How we define our approach to providing this type of support is something that we are constantly refining and looking to expand so it incorporates all elements of family life as holistically as possible. Currently the main delivery vehicles within the Council are the Family Hubs, the Your Place Teams, and the Early Help Pathway incorporating our Parenting & Family Support Service. All of these elements work cohesively to provide everything from preventative information, advice, and guidance through to targeted one on one interventions with families.
15. Our impact is effectively monitored through evidenced based measurement tools, capturing, capturing lived experiences, and in short, is a key part of our approach to ensuring children and families thrive. Whenever we engage with children, young people, and families, this is what they tell us they want; the support to meet their potential and thrive, as evidenced in the accompanying video.
16. Furthermore, through the effective delivery of the strategy, our residents should notice and experience various improvements. There are commitments within the strategy to embed relationship-based practice across the partnership, which means staff and residents will build stronger, more trusting relationships which will lead to better support being provided and better outcomes being achieved.
17. As a partnership, we have taken great strides in recent times to give communities greater voice and to seek input on a host of different issues and initiatives; this can be evidenced in the excellent work that has been completed by the Well Doncaster Team. The Early Help Strategy contains similar commitments that build on this partnership wide drive to involve families and communities in decision making and to truly understand the borough that we serve.

18. We put lived experience at the heart of our decision making and evaluations. This can come in a variety of forms, from questionnaires through to case studies and testimonials, and was demonstrated during the visit to Adwick on 20th September 2023 by families themselves who attended.
19. There are strengths to our offer and approach in Doncaster and there are opportunities for further development. All of this is self-evident when working through the implementation plan for our Early Help Strategy.
20. We know that, alongside a strong core of Family Hubs and Your Place Teams, our system is becoming more defined and coherent. We have built joint approaches to practice, workforce development, quality assurance, and performance management to ensure consistency across the partnership. We have also built robust professional networks and communities of practice that coalesce around both practice specialisms and geographies so that people and places are exposed to consistent approaches of support by those with high levels of knowledge.
21. Ofsted and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities provide external scrutiny to validate our offer in Doncaster. Feedback from Ofsted in this years inspection around the Early Help offer was positive and a recent visit from the Supporting Families team supported this. In addition The recent submission of the Early Help System Guide and subsequent feedback has validated our progression, our areas of strength and development.
22. In terms of developments, we know that we need to build on those strengths, build capacity in the system, and build a better relationship centred on co-production with professionals and communities. Capacity will come from a simpler system and a higher number of lead practitioners and, in turn, mean more and more families will receive early help at the right time.
23. Furthermore, we will deliver a more robust model of co-production as we progress with our work. Our case closures and case audits will continue to capture the voice of families, our Parent & Carer Panels will shape the Family Hub offer, and we will continue to build relationships with the voluntary sector and communities to build resilience and gain crucial understanding.
24. We know this is the right direction for Doncaster for three reasons. Firstly, it will improve outcomes by supporting people earlier and, in turn, alleviate pressure on statutory services. Secondly, it puts families and communities at the heart of decision making. Thirdly, we are in line with, and to a certain degree ahead of the curve when it comes to government policy on this.
25. There are three main documents that currently govern expectations the provision of Early Help. *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018* sets out the statutory obligation to deliver early intervention and prevention services (Early Help) to improve outcomes and contribute to keeping children safe from harm. The *Early Help System Guide* produced by the national supporting families unit sets out the 5 constituent parts of a local early help system;

- a. Family Voice & Experience
- b. Workforce
- c. Communities
- d. Leaders
- e. Data

26. Finally, the *National Family Hub & Start for Life Programme documentation*, in particular Annex E and Annex F, state unequivocally that Family Hubs, relational practice, and full integrated community centred delivery of early intervention and prevention are the foundational elements of a strong early help system.

27. In short, when looking at our Early Help Strategy, the Community Prevention Model being utilised in our Regenerative Neighbourhoods Programme, and national policy drivers like the Supporting Families Programme and Family Hub & Start for Life Programme, there is a natural convergence of thinking.

28. This provides reassurance that our local approaches to early intervention and prevention are both built on solid foundations and evolving in the right way. It also demonstrates that opportunities for further developments and innovations in the short and medium term.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED



29. This section is not applicable.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

30. This section is not applicable.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

31.

Great 8 Priority	Positive Overall	Mix of Positive & Negative	Trade-offs to consider – Negative overall	Neutral or No implications
 Tackling Climate Change				✓
Comments: This section is not applicable.				
 Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work	✓			
Comments: Our Early Help offer contributes to this outcome in two notable ways. Firstly, effective early help can support attendance at school, improving attainment and				

skills in our young people. Secondly, parents can be supported into adult learning services should they want or need that support.



Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs



Comments:

This section is not applicable.



Building opportunities for healthier, happier and longer lives for all



Comments:

The early help system is set up to bring multiple services together, including health-based services, to support families; this can incorporate physical and mental health needs. Furthermore, Family Hubs and Public Health services play an important role in supporting healthy eating and activity across all age ranges.



Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities where everyone belongs



Comments:

The early help system incorporates two elements that contribute to this outcome. The first is that there are commitments to work with voluntary and community groups to support young people and grow opportunities in our communities. Secondly, the offer incorporates support for children and young people ranging from diversionary activity to supporting work around community safety.



Nurturing a child and family-friendly borough



Comments:


Throughout the early help system, every effort is made to work with families and allow their voices and experiences to shape our offer and, more importantly, the support provided to them.

Furthermore, we are keen to use, share, and understand lived experience of our resident.



Building Transport and digital connections fit for the future



<p>Comments:</p> <p>This section is not applicable.</p>				
 <p>Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities</p>				✓
<p>Comments:</p> <p>This section is not applicable.</p>				
Fair & Inclusive	✓			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>Our aim, as a Council, is to improve the quality of life for everyone who lives, visits or works in Doncaster, through promoting inclusion and diversity, tackling inequalities and removing barriers which may prevent people from fulfilling their true potential. Early Help plays a vital role in this by supporting vulnerable families and communities address need effectively.</p> <p>Improved outcomes in all phases will ensure that all children' and their family's needs are met; this will increase and strengthen the Early Help Offer and support our obligations under the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>The Council's responsibility to ensure accessible, good quality Early Help as set out in Working Together 2018 and is central to our current and future approaches to delivering support. Our partnership ensures fair access to Early Help for all Doncaster children, young people and their families.</p>				

Legal Implications

32.No implications have been sought for this report.

Financial Implications

33.No implications have been sought for this report.

Human Resources Implications

34.No implications have been sought for this report.

Technology Implications

35.No implications have been sought for this report.

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

36.**Risk One:** Nationally, there is an increase in need and vulnerability, and this is reflected in Doncaster. This is adding pressure on services that has the dual potential of overwhelming early help support or drawing focus and resources towards statutory, high need, social care interventions.

37. **Mitigation One:** This is being mitigated in three ways. The first is that work continues to further integrate early help approaches into our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub so that pressure and cost is eased on acute services. Secondly, steps are being taken to manage waiting lists proactively with universal support like the Your Families Teams wrapping around families so that need does not escalate whilst they wait for targeted interventions. Thirdly, through the national Family Hub & Start for Life Programme, we have invested heavily in capacity at the universal level, to increase early identification of need, and more targeted support to ensure increased capacity in the formal early help system.
38. **Risk Two:** The current financial pressures on the Council and wider partnership mean that capacity and resource is becoming more difficult to build into the system, reducing the impact of our early intervention and prevention approach
39. **Mitigation Two:** Alongside maximising the impact of external funding sources like the Supporting Families Programme and the Family Hub & Start for Life Programme, we are taking collaborative approaches across the partnership to maximise the reach and impact of current resources.
40. **Risk Three:** The number of Lead Practitioners in the system is currently struggling to return to pre-pandemic levels. Continued failure to grow case-holding capacity in the system will lead to more families either being placed on waiting lists or being left unsupported until they meet thresholds for acute, high-cost interventions.
41. **Mitigation Three:** The partnership will be focusing a series of activities on our Lead Practitioner model to grow numbers, capacity, and efficacy within the system. This will be taking place alongside the activity within Mitigation Two to fully maximise our intervention in the system. We have also directly recruited 4 additional lead practitioner staff within the Family Hubs and 2 pathway leads to maximise case-holding capacity within our model.

CONSULTATION

42. The Early Help strategy was widely consulted on with partners and families being given opportunities to shape its content. Throughout the implementation of the strategy this engagement has continued. Frontline staff work with families to shape interventions, services consult on their offer, and practitioners are regularly engaged with.
43. Moving forward, we will be working within the regional and national policies that are coalescing around a more integrated, holistic approach to consultation and engagement with residents.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

44. The presentation which is being delivered during the meeting is attached as Appendix 1 of this document.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

45. This section is not applicable.

REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS

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