Child Poverty Sub Group

Developing a strategic response to child poverty in Glasgow

The Child Poverty Subgroup have begun to consider evidence, policy and practice relating to child poverty in order to define the context for a strategy to address child poverty in Glasgow. This paper summarises findings from this work to date to stimulate further discussion on the next steps towards developing a strategy. The findings have been brought together with the developmental work carried out for a Child Poverty Toolkit by a Glasgow City Council multi-departmental group of senior managers as a Leading with Impact project from December 2008-June 2009. The Toolkit project report included a recommendation for a Strategy Group for Child Poverty as a subgroup of Children’s Services Planning structures and proposed a list of five standards for the council and its arms length organisations to address child poverty. The Toolkit report also acknowledged that further work was required to develop the approach. The Child Poverty Subgroup provides a structure for the approach and builds on the Toolkit’s recommendations in order to further develop a citywide, multi-agency response to child poverty.

Defining the context

The Definitions Group began by setting out the context for child poverty in Glasgow, summarised below as follows:

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the basis for children to be supported to develop their full potential as individuals and as members of a family and community
- Children in Britain are said to be living in poverty when their families lack resources to enable them to have the customary living conditions and to participate in activities widely approved by the society they live in
- Child poverty is multi-dimensional and includes the complex interactions of mind, body, emotions and society. However, lack of income remains the main cause of poverty and is the indicator we use to measure progress in addressing poverty
- Poverty is unevenly distributed by age, gender and ethnicity. For example, lone parents are known to experience the greatest risk of experiencing poverty and the majority of lone parents are women. Women also make up the majority of low-paid, part-time workers but the gendered nature of child poverty has to be fully understood in order to develop an effective response
- Families where children or adults have a disability are also known to be at greater risk of poverty than the population in general
- Addressing the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty must include action by families, the benefits system, health and social care providers, education, childcare providers, employers and wider society
- Current Scottish policy supports the prioritisation of addressing child poverty by public sector agencies. However, recent political changes together with the advent of the recession is likely to impact severely on families most at risk of child poverty, for example, capping housing costs, increasing the cost of or reducing availability of childcare.

The development of Children’s Health and Well-being indicators for Glasgow by Glasgow Centre for Population Health will provide the means of tracking the progress
of poverty reduction through measures for income and through measures relating to multi-dimensional elements of the impact of poverty on children’s health and well-being. The domains for the indicators at the time of writing include poverty, safety/law and order, education/learning, health, and wellbeing and at the time of writing are still in development.

The Council’s Leading with Impact Child Poverty Toolkit proposed that all council departments and related Arms Length External Organisations demonstrate their commitment to a child poverty strategy by assessing all their actions for impact on child poverty. It recommended five standards for strategic self assessment in order to clarify the approach taken, their vision for child poverty, performance management, partnership working and appropriate resources allocated to child poverty. The five standards each have a related set of specific actions that have the potential for further development by the Child Poverty Subgroup. However, the Subgroup has proposed a wider set of partners and actions than those considered by the Toolkit group and seeks to address the causes and effects of child poverty through the following actions:

- Providing a citywide strategic framework and leadership for tackling child poverty
- Engaging stakeholders
- Ensuring clarity of outcomes expected for addressing child poverty
- Taking inequality issues into account
- Encouraging mainstream, multi-agency services to include actions that positively impact on child poverty
- Assessing effectiveness of the strategic framework by monitoring and evaluation
- Ensuring that the framework fits with other actions to improve health and wellbeing in Glasgow, including practice and Children’s Services Planning.

The scheme below builds on the findings of the Definitions Group to date and places them in the context of the work of the wider Subgroup in order to provide the basis for further discussion and to clarify areas for further development of a Child Poverty Strategy for Glasgow.
Reduce Child Poverty

• The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the basis for the strategy: children are individuals within context of family and society
• Children are living in poverty when they lack resources to enable the customary living conditions and activities of the society they live in
• Child poverty is multi-dimensional but lack of income remains the main cause of poverty
• Poverty is unevenly distributed by age, gender and ethnicity. Women are at particular risk as the are more likely than men to be lone parents or in low-paid, part-time work. In addition, families with disabled children or adults are more likely to be poor
• Addressing the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty might include action by families, the benefits system, health and social care providers, education, childcare providers, employers and wider society
• Scottish policy supports public sector agencies to address child poverty but political changes and the recession could impact most severely on families already most at risk of child poverty.

Key principles Underpinning the strategy

• Engage key stakeholders in addressing key questions on how Glasgow can tackle child poverty, including parents and children with experience of poverty
• Provide a citywide strategic framework and leadership for tackling child poverty
• Ensure that the strategic framework and interventions across the children’s services system take inequality issues into account
• Practical support for services to focus on the impact of policies and plans on children and young people
• Assess effectiveness of the strategic framework through monitoring and evaluation
• Ensure that the framework fits with other actions to improve health and wellbeing in Glasgow, including frontline practice and Children’s Services Planning.

Elements of a Child Poverty Strategy for Glasgow

• Increase incomes for families in, or at risk of falling into poverty, eg through income maximisation and supporting parents into and within employment
• Reduce outgoings of families by ensuring that services contributing to children reaching their potential are affordable, equitable and of high quality, eg childcare, education, nutritious food, health enhancing environments
• Mitigate of the impact of poverty on physical and mental health eg service planning and delivery considers risk factors for poverty and its impact on the health and wellbeing of children.

What actions can Glasgow agencies take to tackle child poverty?

Measures of progress

Data re poverty levels and children’s health and well being indicators tbc
In summary, the work of the Child Poverty Subgroup to date has established that the main factor in reducing poverty is achieving a higher, secure income. A child poverty strategy for Glasgow should also aim to reduce the outgoings for families at risk and influence the ways in which services respond to children affected by poverty in addition to aiming to increase income. We have defined a multi-dimensional model of causes and effects of child poverty, which we intend to use to engage all stakeholders in Glasgow in addressing child poverty including families with direct experience of poverty. We have begun to map some examples of practice including the roles of Glasgow Works, the NHS, and campaigns such as End Child Poverty, and plan to further explore the roles of the Council, the GHA and the other Subgroups of the Children’s Services Planning Group. There is also potential for further exploring the Leading with Impact Toolkit to develop the means for supporting mainstream services in clarifying and planning actions and outcomes for child poverty. We have established a link with the Glasgow Centre for Population Health programme on child health and well-being indicators for measuring progress on improving income levels and on some of the wider dimensions of child poverty. In addition, at the time of writing we are exploring further the impact of recent policy changes and the recession on child poverty, clarifying our understanding of the gendered nature of child poverty and the pivotal role for childcare in contributing to access to employment and support for raising children.

At the time of writing, the group have identified further questions of interest for exploration including:

- The vision for what kind of a city we want for children
- Long term financial support available for a Child Poverty Strategy
- The degree of autonomy available at city level in order to develop an effective strategy to meet local need
- Involvement of families and children living on low incomes in the development of the strategy
- We need to understand better the issue of ‘persistent poverty’ including patterns in Glasgow and actions that would lift people out of it
- More debate about the existence and negative impact of discrimination of people living in poverty (termed ‘povertyism’ or ‘othering’).