

North Somerset CYPS Strategic Commissioning Team

Pathways out of Poverty



Introduction

Welcome to North Somerset's Child Poverty Strategy: Pathways out of Poverty

Together, across the North Somerset Partnership we are determined to improve life chances for children who live in poverty. We welcome the duty placed on local authorities by the Government for us to work together to reduce child poverty in North Somerset.

However, we also recognise that it will not be easy to 'radically reduce child poverty by 2020' as outlined in The Child Poverty Act, 2010. It will be a challenge for a number of reasons, including

The Institute of Fiscal studies have predicted that the numbers of children living in poverty will rise over the next few years

North Somerset Council will have £1 less to spend in every £3 compared to the amount it had to spend in 2010/11, by 2015.

In North Somerset, most children and young people benefit from a secure path into adulthood. However, there is a significant gap between the outcomes of children and young people whose families are poor and those who are better off. Children in poverty have worse health and education outcomes and experience poorer life chances. Certain population groups are at increased risk of poverty including families with a disabled member; lone parents; large families; and workless families.

So what can we do? We have to be smart, creative and determined. We need to concentrate on practical steps that will help mitigate the

effect poverty can have on children and work to improve opportunities for children to learn. We also need to recognize that we are already working to improve this situation, sometimes with great success, but that coordinating our efforts and working together will mean that we achieve better results more often and that these improvements are sustained and built on.

The opportunity gap has to be addressed at every stage in the life cycle, from the Foundation Years through to the world of work. And North Somerset Partnership cannot do it alone. Employers, parents, schools, communities and voluntary organisations all have a part to play.

I am proud of the commitment made by our colleagues across the North Somerset Partnership to work together to address this important issue. I am also pleased to see that as requested at our Child Poverty Conference: Pathways out of Poverty – pledges from Colleagues and teams are still being made to mitigate the impact of poverty on children.

I urge you all to stick to the pledges you made at Conference and congratulate those of you who are finding new ways to collaborate with colleagues to improve outcomes for children across North Somerset who are affected by poverty.

*Graham Turner, Chief Executive Officer,
North Somerset Council*

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Executive Summary

The life chances and outcomes for the majority of North Somerset's 45,000¹ children are good. The local area is known for its high quality of schools and most children and young people benefit from a secure path into adulthood.

However, despite this high quality environment, there is still a significant gap between the outcomes of children and young people who are poor and those who are not poor.

This Child Poverty Strategy² aims to improve life chances for this vulnerable group by:

- providing an overview of the current picture for children and young people in North Somerset who are poor and examine the potential causes of this
- drawing on recent national independent reviews and applying their findings where appropriate
- reflecting Government policies on how best to improve life chances for this vulnerable group of children
- exploring possible pathways out of poverty for children and families in North Somerset
- drawing together and building on existing strategies already in place in North Somerset to close gaps
- incorporating an active commitment to reducing child poverty and mitigating its effects
- making recommendations on how the North Somerset Partnership can prevent poor children from becoming poor adults

This Strategy has been developed in close collaboration and consultation with a range of partner organisations, and crucially with the voices of children and young people at the forefront of our considerations.

Child Poverty – North Somerset and the national picture

1. North Somerset's Child Poverty Strategy outlines the life chances for the 14% of its children and young people who live in relative poverty and sets out pathways to prevent poor children becoming poor adults.
2. National data (End Child Poverty Maps, 2011) shows that in 2010 North Somerset had 6,067 children living in relative poverty. Local Revenues and Benefits housing benefit data shows a slightly higher number for May 2011, at 7,600 children and young people (Liberata May 2011). Of the 7,600 children in poverty, 5,019 of them live in single parent families.
3. Children who live in poverty are almost equally split between the three locality areas of North Somerset (South, East and Central/North).
4. There is also considerable variation in how accessible universal services, such as healthcare, schools, retail and employment opportunities, are across North Somerset. Research indicates that this would present a barrier in rural areas to seeking advice and support, and in achieving the practical steps which provide pathways out of poverty.
5. Reducing child poverty will be a challenge in the current economic climate. The Institute of Fiscal Studies predicts the numbers of children living in relative poverty will remain stagnant in 2011/12 and rise in 2012/13. Meanwhile the resources available to address these issues continue to see reductions across all partner agencies.

¹2010 Office for National Statistics Mid-Year Population Estimates

²Unlike some other Local Authority areas, no separate Child Poverty Needs Assessment document has been produced. However, there has been extensive research (desk-based, consultative and statistical work) behind the development of this Strategy. All essential and relevant facts, figures and consultation work are incorporated and referenced within this Strategy document.

Key findings

Education

- 2010 attainment levels of pupils eligible for Free School Meals in North Somerset were below the South West and National average.
- The link between poverty and attainment is acknowledged to be strong, and merits strategies to ensure this cohort is recognised as a vulnerable group for the purposes of improving attainment.
- The Early Years matter most in determining a child's future life chances.

Employment

- New employment opportunities have been stagnant in North Somerset for the last 20 years.
- There are 0.67 jobs per working age adult. This is the 7th lowest ratio in the South West and getting worse year on year.
- There is a 40,000 gap between the number of working age adults and jobs in North Somerset.
- There are 8,000 businesses in North Somerset (ABI 2008) – 70% of which employ 4 people or less.
- There are just 60 Companies in North Somerset who employ 100 people or more – 10 of these are Supermarkets.

Teenage pregnancy

- Children of teenage mothers have a 63% increased risk of being born into poverty compared to babies born to mothers in their 20s.
- 70% of mothers aged 16-19 claim Income Support.
- Teenage mothers are more likely to partner with men who are poorly qualified and more likely to experience unemployment.

Health

- North Somerset has the widest gap in life expectancy in the South West and a bigger gap than the England average.
- The difference between the most affluent 20% and most deprived 20% of the population in life expectancy for 2007-9 was 9 years for men and 6 years for women.
- Hospital admissions for illicit drug use in the most deprived areas are 10 times higher than in affluent areas.
- Childhood obesity is significantly higher in deprived areas than less deprived areas.

Housing

- There are approximately 2400 families living in North Somerset who are in housing need and are waiting for social housing.
- There is a limited supply of affordable housing in North Somerset and as result there is an increased reliance on the private rented sector to provide accommodation for families in housing need.
- There are concerns that the private rented sector will continue to become less affordable in future for families in housing need due to national changes to benefit entitlements
- There is a continuing need to work with landlords to ensure an increased supply of appropriate housing for households with children.

Debt

- The Citizens Advice Bureau is currently working with 900 cases of debt management in Weston. This totals £14.4 million debt.

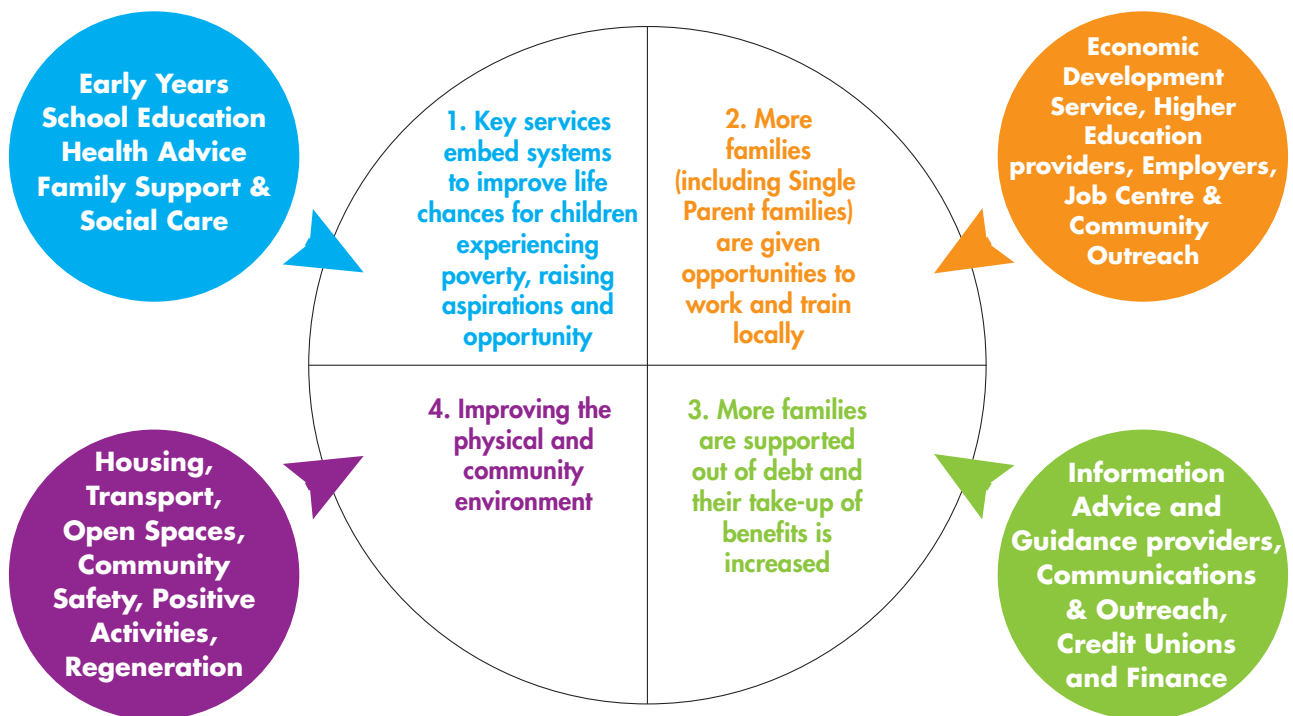
Table of Recommendations

Pathways out of poverty:

The Strategy outlines the following recommendations, grouped around four key themes. These are our “pathways out of poverty”:

1. Improving life chances through services working directly with children.
2. Increasing opportunities for parents and young people to work and train locally.
3. Promoting financial inclusion.
4. Improving the physical and community environment.

We have aimed to make these recommendations achievable and relevant to the current work of partner agencies, whilst still setting high expectations around our efforts to identify and minimise the effects of child poverty.



Underpinning this are a number of strategic or whole system recommendations as detailed below.

Following the publication of this strategy, clear outcomes supported by measurable targets will be developed for each recommendation to support annual monitoring and review of progress by the People and Communities Board.

Whole System

Strategic Recommendations

1. All Partners will identify and recognise in principle the specific needs of children who live in poverty. They will also pledge to develop practical measures to improve their life chances to embed high expectations for them.
2. We must make Child Poverty everyone's business and improve collaboration to improve life chances.
3. All services, including schools, will further develop practical measures to listen to and enable the voice of vulnerable children and young people living in poverty.
4. Opportunities for children's and parents' participation in decisions about services must be strengthened, and we must ensure that such opportunities are genuinely representative of groups and areas where poverty is experienced.
5. Performance against these recommendations will be annually monitored and reviewed to ensure evidence-based practice.

Pathway 1 - Improving life chances through services working directly with children.

Education

6. Raise attainment for vulnerable children, particularly those who are eligible for free school, meals by:
 - collaborative working with schools to set ambitious targets
 - assigning the Children and Young People's Learning Exchange Lead Advisor for vulnerable groups to raise awareness of the Child Poverty Strategy within schools and school improvement, coordinating new Learning and Exchange networks. Work should include addressing stigma and social exclusion
 - training and workshops for schools and governing bodies to raise awareness of child poverty, and to develop strategies to improve outcomes
 - developing a multi agency Strategic Group and working party that has a remit for improving outcomes for children and young people in poverty
 - developing and sharing an intelligence base of evidence on 'what works' to raise attainment for this group of children.

Early Years

7. Protect and further develop Local Authority investment in universal Early Years services through:
 - weighting resources to the most disadvantaged children
 - encouraging and supporting the ambitious use of Children's Centres to support vulnerable families, encouraging co-location of a wide range of services including voluntary and civil society partners
 - using evidence-based parenting programmes.

Health

8. Deliver preventative work with families in partnership with other agencies (for example, as with the MEND programme for children above a healthy weight, a joint collaboration between the PCT, North Somerset Council and schools).
9. Find ways to collaborate and information share with agencies around individual vulnerable children.
10. Link with Adult Services to address parents' needs for support around addiction, mental health, healthy eating and smoking, to model better health behaviour for vulnerable children.
11. Following the review of the North Somerset Partnership, the emerging People and Communities Board will combine the strategic functions of the Children and Families Partnership, Health and Wellbeing and Safer Stronger Communities Boards. This group will be committed to developing and ensuring delivery of a unified People and Communities Plan, which includes a specific chapter detailing a partnership response to Child Poverty.



Pathway 2 - Increasing opportunities for parents and young people to work and train locally.

Employment

12. We will ensure that work to address child poverty takes place across North Somerset Partnership, and extends to ensure we are working closely and sharing responsibility for key outcomes with agencies engaged to deliver services, such as the future provider of European Social Fund (ESF) services to workless families with multiple needs.
13. Ensure the scope of employment advice and support recognises and promotes employment opportunities outside of the local area where there is limited local supply.
14. We will ensure that the experience and incidence of child poverty influences the development of North Somerset Partnership's wider economic assessments and strategies, and that the need to provide employment accessible to parents when encouraging new local enterprises is reflected in these initiatives.
15. Prioritise funding public transport routes to main employment organisations (e.g. Bristol Airport, Council and Health Offices).
16. We will ensure that future procurement of products and services by the Council and its partners encourages and challenges potential suppliers to source materials, resources and the labour force locally, where possible, creating opportunities suitable for those working to escape poverty.

Pathway 3 - Promoting financial inclusion.

Financial Inclusion, Benefits and Debt

17. Improve debt and advice and benefit take up through:
 - the identification and targeting of vulnerable customers
 - improving the availability of on-the-ground outreach services to promote awareness of debt issues and to increase benefit take-up.
 - better sharing of benefits-related data between Partners as necessary, to inform Strategy delivery.

Pathway 4 - Improving the physical and community environment.

Housing

18. Continue to work and develop relationships with private landlords to ensure the quality of private rented stock.
19. Support vulnerable families through the complexities of accessing secure and appropriate housing, including the application process.
20. Continue to work with Registered Housing providers to deliver new affordable family housing.

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

21. Continue to develop multi-agency and information sharing collaboration to work to reduce criminal activity and anti-social behaviour associated with poverty.
22. Continue to develop effective ways to ensure children and young people have access to quality positive activities in their area and are informed about them.

Section 1: The Background Context

Introduction

The life chances and outcomes for the majority of North Somerset's 45,000³ children are good. The local area is known for its high quality of schools and most children and young people benefit from a secure path into adulthood.

However, despite this high quality environment, there is still a significant gap between the outcomes of children and young people who are poor and those who are not poor.

This Child Poverty Strategy⁴ aims to improve life chances for this vulnerable group by:

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- making recommendations on how the Children and Families Partnership can prevent poor children from becoming poor adults.

This Strategy has been developed in close collaboration and consultation with a range of partner organisations, and with the voices of children and young people at the forefront of our considerations.

The National Purpose for the Child Poverty Strategy

The Child Poverty Act received Royal Assent on 25th March 2010.

The Act places a number of duties on Local Authorities and named partners, (Health Authorities – Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities, Job Centre Plus, Police, and Youth Offending Services) to:

- cooperate with each other to tackle child poverty
- conduct a local child poverty needs assessment and deliver a joint local strategy for reducing child poverty.

The Government's commitment to child poverty builds on the previous Government's work, which concluded with the Child Poverty Act 2010. A delivery framework was published in April 2011 and lays out proposals for meeting the 2020 targets for the 'eradication' of child poverty "A New Approach to Child Poverty, Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families' Lives". This is founded on the understanding that poverty is about far more than income and must also build the life chances of children by increasing opportunity, supporting families and raising aspirations.

At its heart is:

- strengthening families
- encouraging responsibility
- promoting work

³2010 Office for National Statistics Mid-Year Population Estimates

⁴Unlike some other Local Authority areas, no separate Child Poverty Needs Assessment document has been produced. However, this chapter is based on extensive national and local research. All essential and relevant facts, figures and consultation work are incorporated and referenced within this Strategy document.

- guaranteeing fairness
- providing support for the most vulnerable⁵

The national strategy recognises the key role that Local Authorities will play in tackling child poverty. As experiences of poverty vary from area to area across the country, local strategies to combat child poverty will need to identify and address issues locally and collaboratively. A focus on early intervention will help prevent the cumulative and long term effects.

The Local Purpose for a Child Poverty Strategy

Locally, we have a very real issue to address in terms of child poverty. It is having a severely adverse impact on children and young people’s life chances in North Somerset.

There are challenges for children and their families in North Somerset in following pathways out of poverty and financial independence for children and families. Such pathways can include attainment at school, access to local jobs, avoiding family breakdown, access to affordable homes, childcare and debt support and advice.

A collaborative commitment is therefore required. Child poverty is everybody’s business. A shared understanding about child poverty in North Somerset is needed to be able to address our legal duties, facilitate spending of shrinking resources and ultimately to improve outcomes for this group of children and young people.

The Strategic Partnership Context

North Somerset Partnership (NSP) is the Local Strategic Partnership which develops a high level strategic direction for local services via the Sustainable Community Strategy. NSP has recently undertaken a review of its partnership arrangements, grouping future workstreams under two new boards: **Infrastructure and Local Economy Board** and **People and Communities**. The People and Communities board will assume the role of three existing strategic boards, including their statutory responsibilities:

- Children and Families Partnership
- Health and Wellbeing
- Safer Stronger Communities

The People and Communities Board will produce a plan which incorporates a number of key elements or chapters which will encompass the content of the Children and Families Partnership Plan and Child Poverty Strategy in a wider strategic context. This single strategic plan will draw on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to inform its focus and strategic direction.

Child poverty will have considerable cross-cutting links with the Transport, Economy and Environment Plan, and the revised partnership structure ensures that these links will be forged at the level of the North Somerset Partnership Board – the highest level of strategic planning.

NORTH SOMERSET PARTNERSHIP BOARD

*produces and monitors delivery of Sustainable Communities Strategy
manages new Local Area Agreements and Performance Reward Grant projects*

People and Communities Board

Single strategic plan including:

Health and Wellbeing Strategy
Children and Families Plan
Child Poverty Strategy
Safer and Stronger Strategy

Informed by: JSNA

Infrastructure and Local Economy Board

Single strategic plan including:

Local Transport Planning
Planning and Development Frameworks
Local Economic Partnership Planning

Informed by:

Local Economic Assessment

Links to Corporate Strategy

The Child Poverty Strategy is strongly linked to the following strands of the North Somerset Council Corporate Plan, either by directly influencing delivery of the priority or contributing to other Council activity focused on achieving these aims.

Promote lifelong learning opportunities	Enhance health and well-being	Protect and improve the environment	Build safer and stronger communities	Increase prosperity
Enable schools to raise attainment levels	Improve outcomes and reduce costs of children's services by enabling early intervention and prevention	Improve transport Infrastructure	Strengthen safeguarding for children and vulnerable adults	Significantly increase the number of local jobs
Develop a workforce with the skills that businesses need	Improve health outcomes			
Increase employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed	Work with communities to better meet local housing need			

In addition, the Child Poverty Strategy will be an active, regularly reviewed section of the People and Communities Strategy, which will contribute to maintaining high performance across the Council, by prioritising and influencing the use of finite resources, and focusing activity on those areas of work which can most significantly affect the life chances of children and young people, and thus reduce their reliance on services in adult life.

What is Poverty?

The Child Poverty Act 2010 (“the Child Poverty Act”) sets out UK-wide targets relating to the eradication of child poverty. It provides that it is the duty of the UK Government to ensure that the child poverty targets are met in relation to the year commencing 1 April 2020. These targets relate to levels of child poverty in terms of: relative low income, combined low income and material deprivation, absolute low income and persistent poverty⁶.

Broadly stated, the UK-wide child poverty targets provided for in the Child Poverty Act are:

- **the relative low income target** – that less than 10% of children live in households that have a household income of less than 60% of median household income
- **the combined low income and material deprivation target** – that less than 5% of children live in households that have a household income of less than 70% of median household income **and** experience material deprivation
- **the absolute low income target** – that less than 5% of children live in households that have a household income of less than 60% of the median household income for the financial year starting on 1 April 2010
- **the persistent poverty target** – to reduce the proportion of children that experience long periods of relative poverty (that is to reduce the percentage of children who live in households that have a household income of less than 60% of the median household income for three years out of a four-year period) with the specific target percentage to be set at a later date.

The ‘relative income’ definition is the most commonly cited, for which local data is currently available⁷. For this reason this definition is used here. The Act defines this as “60% of median equivalised net household income for the

financial year”. In other words, this is household income of 60% or less of contemporary median income before housing costs.⁸

In 2010/11, the poverty line implied by the measure of relative low income is set out below. These values refer to all sources of income after subtracting tax and national insurance and paying all benefits and tax credits. The figures assume all children are under 14⁹.

Lone parent, 1 child	£214 per week
Lone parent, 2 children	£263 per week
Lone parent, 3 children	£312 per week
Couple 1 child	£295 per week
Couple 2 children	£344 per week
Couple 3 children	£393 per week

However, it is worth emphasising that poverty is about more than just income and that while income maximisation is a key factor in reducing poverty, there are wider issues to be addressed – such as material deprivation, social exclusion and low aspiration – if the life chances of the people in North Somerset are to be improved.

⁶Child Poverty Act 2010, Part 1.

⁷This is because it is a current Local Government performance indicator for which statistics are collected, National Indicator 116.

⁸Whilst the Act describes this as net income, national statistics currently measure this locally based upon gross income due to data limitations. For more technical information, see: <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/personal-tax-credits/ni116-tech-note.pdf>

⁹Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2010, Child And Working Age Poverty Set To Rise In The Next 3 Years, http://www.ifs.org.uk/pr/child_poverty2013.pdf



Who is at risk of poverty and social exclusion?

Children of lone-parent families

There are currently 5,019 children growing up in 3127 single parent families in North Somerset claiming passported benefits¹⁰

Children in large families (more than three children)

There are currently 421 single parent families with three or more children claiming passported benefits¹¹

Children growing up in households where there are no members in full-time employment

There are currently 15,500 working age adults who are unemployed in North Somerset¹²

Children from families of some minority ethnic groups

Population is low in these groups locally, and their needs may easily be misunderstood.¹³

Children in households with a disabled child or adult

Households with a disabled child are among some of the poorest of the poor (Heslop 1999). Families with more than one disabled child are likely to be lone parents, workless, in low paid employment or reliant on income support (Lawton). Siblings in these families not only share their families' experiences of poverty but may themselves have the added responsibility of caring at a young age (Becker 1998). It is estimated there are 290 children who are carers in North Somerset. There is a higher concentration of young carers in South Weston (JSNA).

¹⁰Passported benefits cover a wide variety of benefits and entitlements that claimants may be entitled to when they are awarded tax credits. See, for example, <http://www.revenuebenefits.org.uk/tax-credits/guidance/how-much-can-your-client-get/passported-benefits/>

¹¹Liberata North Somerset Revenues and Benefits Data, May 2011-06-07

¹²North Somerset Economic Development Service, May 2011.

¹³See for example, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2007, <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/poverty-and-ethnicity-uk>



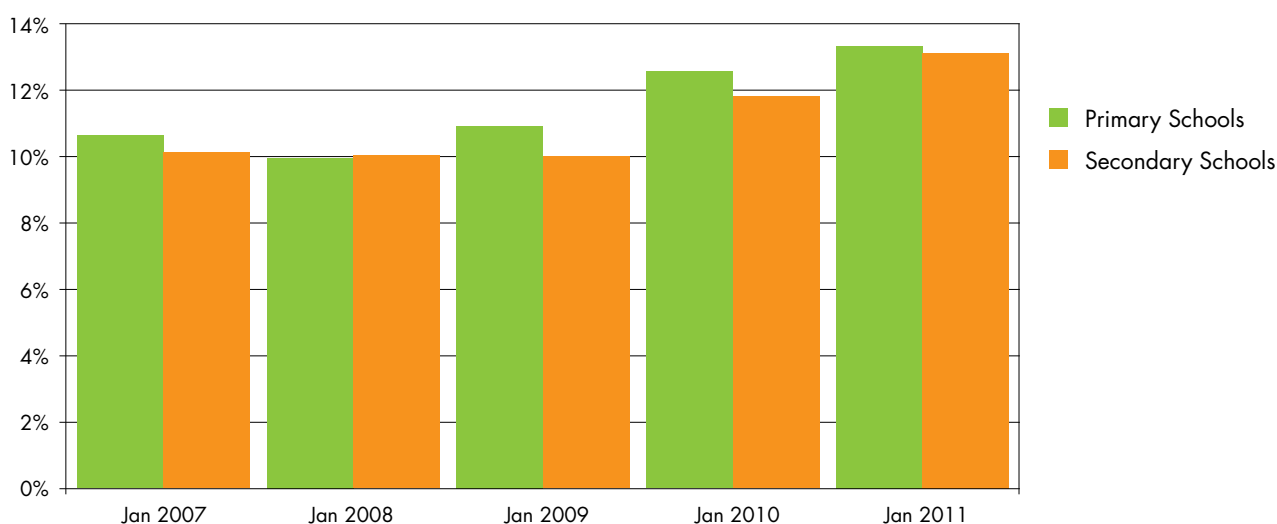
National Child Poverty Trends

Under the last Government, the number of children living in relative poverty fell (Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) report May 2010). This report responds to Households Below Average Income data released in May 10. IFS suggest the main driver for a reduction in child poverty numbers in 2009/10 (and over the recession) was strong growth in income from benefits and tax credits, which grew by 6.7% in real terms.

However, the IFS warn that a large part of this increase in income from benefits and tax credits is unlikely to be permanent. They predict the Government's cuts to benefits and tax credits are likely to reduce household incomes. The IFS do not expect the recent downhill trend in child poverty numbers to be permanent. They predict child poverty figures will remain stagnant in 2011/2012 and rise in 2012/2013.

In North Somerset, the bar charts below show an increase in free school meal eligibility since 2008 at primary and secondary level (an indication of child poverty in a household).

Trends for free school meals eligibility for primary and secondary schools



How many children does poverty affect in North Somerset?

National Data shows the percentage of children in relative poverty is 14% (national average 22/23%). This equates to 6067 children and young people *National Data – End Child Poverty Maps Published March 2011*

Local Data (based on local Revenues and Benefits May 2011 claimant data) shows that:

The number of children living in relative poverty estimated to be 7,600 (17%). Of these children 5,019 (66%) of them live in single parent families (2,581 live in families with two parents)

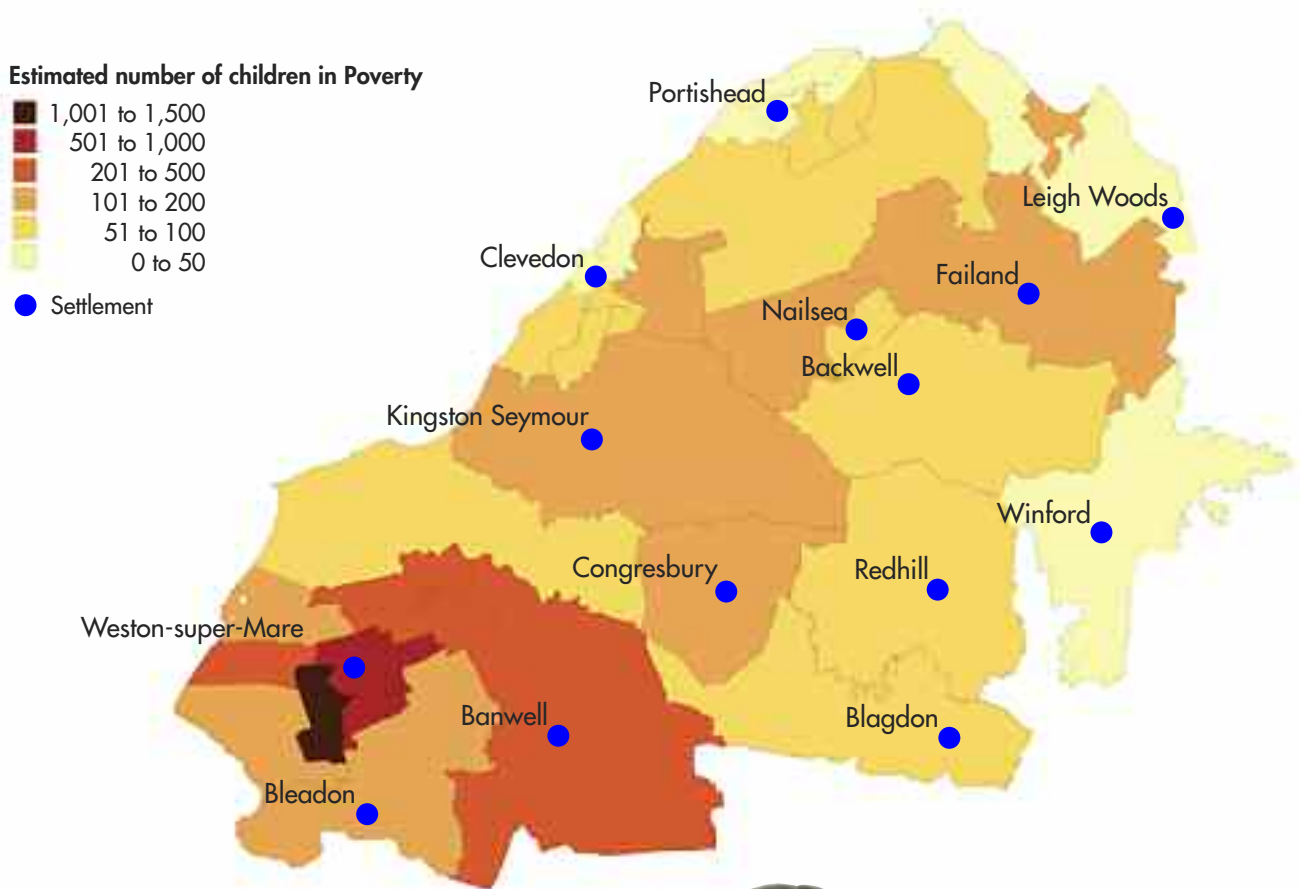
These children live in 4,430 families across North Somerset, of which 3,127 (71%) are single parent families¹⁴. National research suggests that 9/10 single parent families are headed by women¹⁵.

¹⁴The data was extracted using a local model designed to approximate to 60% of median income, considering both household income and family structure.

¹⁵<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/commentaries/family.asp>

Where Do These Children Live?

The following maps show how, according to national sources (End Poverty Now Map Of Child Poverty 2010), child poverty is distributed across North Somerset.



Clearly, concentrations of child poverty are evident across Weston-super-Mare, but significant pockets are also present and spread across other parts of North Somerset, including rural areas.



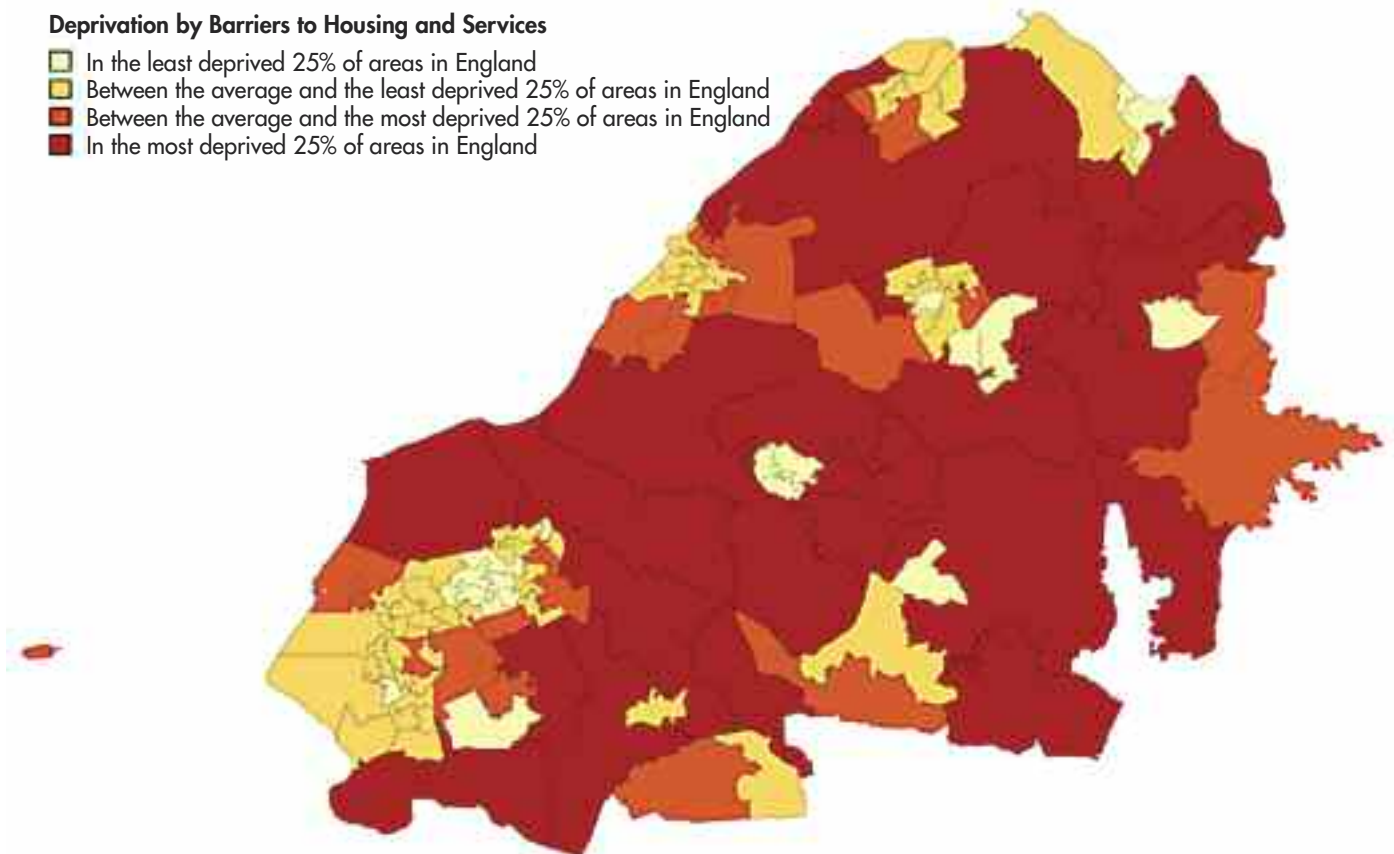
The English Indices of Deprivation (IMD 2010) data shows the barriers to housing and services need to be considered for children and families who live in more rural areas across North Somerset.

Barriers to housing and services include

- household overcrowding
- housing affordability
- road distance to a food shop
- road distance to a post office
- homelessness
- road distance to a GP
- road distance to a primary school.

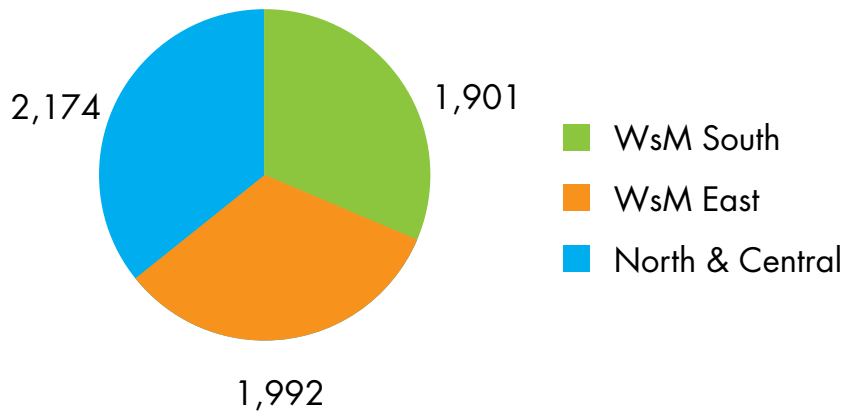
Deprivation by Barriers to Housing and Services

- In the least deprived 25% of areas in England
- Between the average and the least deprived 25% of areas in England
- Between the average and the most deprived 25% of areas in England
- In the most deprived 25% of areas in England



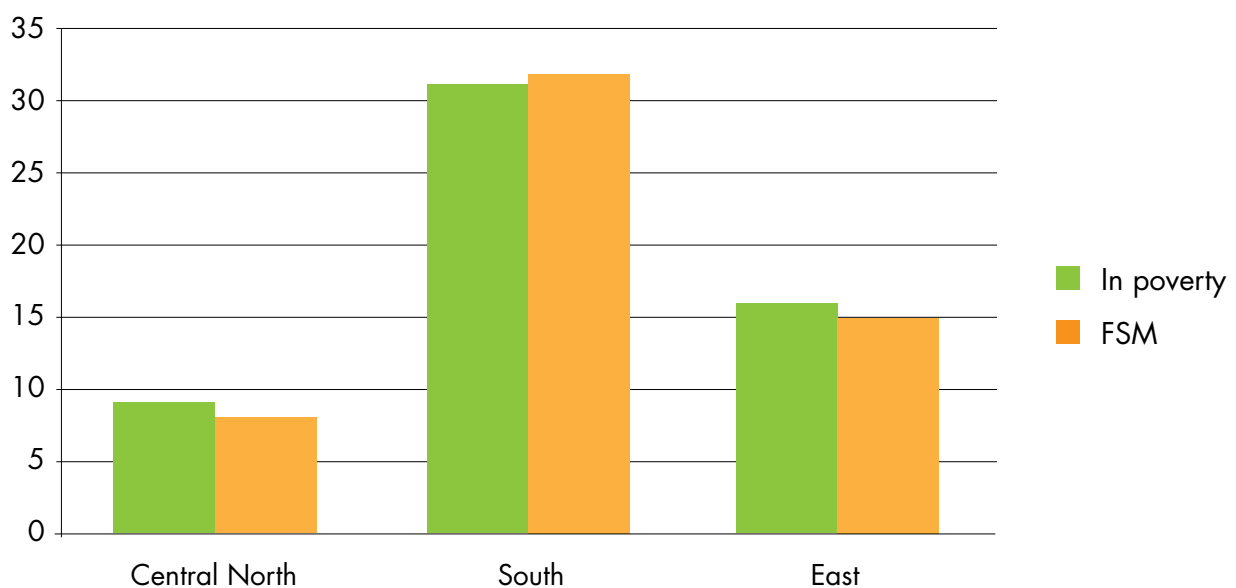
In order to highlight that child poverty is not just an issue for Weston-super-Mare, it is important to look at real numbers of children who live in poverty in North Somerset. The number of children is evenly split between the three localities, with slightly more in North and Central Locality Area.

Children in relative poverty by North Somerset Locality Area
2010 (number)



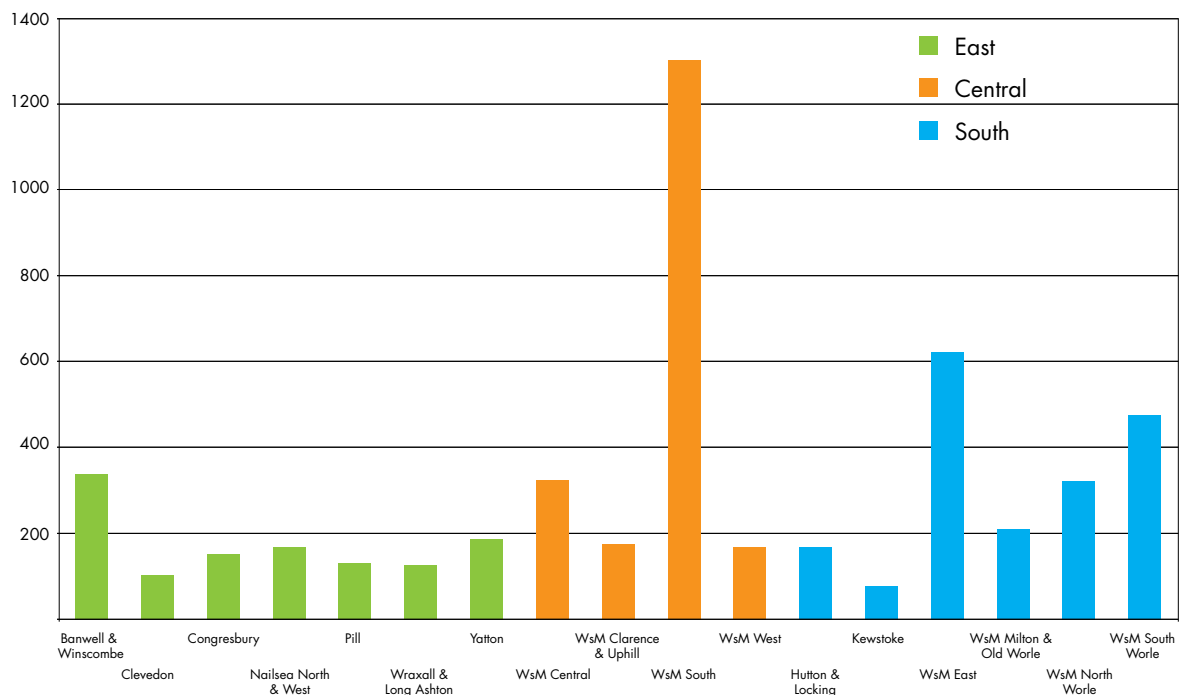
This fact can be easily lost as the percentage of children in the North/Central Locality Area in poverty is low at 9%, compared to 16% in Weston East Locality and 31% in South Locality.

A comparison of the % of children living in relative poverty and those eligible for free school meals by Locality



The bar chart below shows the wards in North Somerset with over 100 children who live in relative poverty:

Number of children in relative poverty



Wards in North Somerset with over 100 children in relative poverty

Similar findings are obtained when other information is considered, such as the resident location of those receiving Free School Meals, or where Citizens Advice Bureau queries originate.

In addition to the actual numbers, North Somerset is an economically diverse area with areas of extreme affluence and considerable deprivation and is more likely to experience wider inequalities than areas with more similar populations. North Somerset has the 7th largest range of inequality of all the 326 authorities in England. Technical examination of IMD statistics also evidences that the range of inequality has widened since 2000¹⁶. Whilst in part this may be seen as the product of how administrative boundaries are drawn across the land, this is still a significantly higher ranking than elsewhere in the West of England sub-region.

Given both these numbers and the inequality present, it is essential to examine poverty by both numbers and percentages of children to understand the picture of poverty at a local level.

¹⁶Source: The English Indices of Deprivation 2010, Internal North Somerset Briefing Note.

2010 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), published 2011 shows that:

- 20 (16%) of North Somerset's lower super output areas are in the top 10% most affluent areas in England and
- 7 (5.6%) are in the in the 10% most deprived areas.
- For issues such as employment, health, housing and environment:
 - Weston Central is in the most deprived 1% IMD wards across England
 - South Ward is in the most 2% deprived IMD wards across England.¹⁷

Child Poverty Maps show a similar picture with:

- Weston-super-Mare South Ward being the third poorest ward in the South West (the first and second poorest wards are in Bristol).

Poverty and Multiple Disadvantages

Families experiencing multiple vulnerabilities

For some families, poverty does not come alone but is part of a complex set of vulnerabilities which cumulatively prevent them from taking the action or sustaining the conditions necessary to move out of poverty.

Most notably there are similarities between the five risk areas of poverty outlined in the National Strategy and the five areas of significant risk which have been identified in national Serious Case Reviews – this suggests a relationship between the conditions which cause families to experience poverty and those which have been evidenced in situations where children experience extreme neglect and ultimately suffer the severest forms of harm.

Risk Areas of Poverty	Serious Case Review Risk Areas
Worklessness Education Failure Family and Relationship Breakdown Addiction Debt	Parental Involvement in Crime Learning Disability Domestic Abuse Parental Substance Misuse Parental Mental Health

National and local studies also indicate that highly vulnerable families, requiring multiple interventions from numerous agencies, are more likely to experience poverty, and that this is likely to be a contributing factor to the many challenges faced. As Rake, Chief Executive of the Family and Parenting Institute comments, "Poverty is the enemy of childhood, of families and of successful family relationships... A child raised in poverty is generally far behind their middle class peers when they start school. But they are also more likely to see their parents separate – and to go on to form unstable family relationships themselves" (Rake, Family and Parenting Institute, April 2011).

¹⁷<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/indices2010%20>



On the other hand, there are still opportunities for such children and young people to escape cycles of poverty and vulnerability, particularly if families receive the right support services early and develop personal resilience to their challenging circumstances. For example, Munro's final review of Children's Social Care (2011) notes that "it is also known that many children and young people affected by these factors nonetheless thrive. This is important because it indicates that these circumstances do not make harm inevitable" (Munro, 2011: 70).

Therefore this strategy proposes that "Child Poverty is everyone's business" in the sense that workers from all partner agencies will encounter families where their financial, employment, health and housing situations are impacting on their ability to provide adequate care and

appropriate conditions for children to thrive. This is particularly the case for colleagues who will encounter poverty alongside the most challenging family circumstances.

In order to work with families successfully to counter these effects, workers require:

- an understanding of the causes, effects and intergenerational cycles of poverty
- an appreciation of stigma and disengagement from both the parent's and child's perspective
- an awareness of the services, support and benefits which can begin to address the causes of child poverty
- the means of sharing information to ensure that parents access to support is simplified, demystified and hastened

- links to health, schools and other agencies which can ensure that the work they begin is sustained and developed further to allow children to succeed
- further work to develop and identify knowledge systems to identify high-risk families and intervene early on.

The wide-ranging and ambitious Transformation Programme which Children and Young People's Services is currently undertaking will refocus front line Social Care and Family Support work in **Community Family Teams**, which will be well placed to provide the conditions above to support workers in addressing child poverty and supporting families in breaking cycles. Central to this is the greater co-location of staff, closer multi-agency working, pooling of resources and clearer information sharing. New ways of multi-agency working have already been trialled in Weston-super-Mare, and evaluation of this work has concluded that such new approaches can improve outcomes for some vulnerable families, particularly where the intervention is preventative. Including consideration of poverty in such working practices, for example ensuring that family members are wherever possible able to get back into mainstream employment and training, is therefore a crucial part of this strategy.

Alongside this, the strategic leadership of the **People and Communities Board** have the necessary links and influence to align organisational practices to promote a common understanding of poverty, address areas where services are misaligned or do not effectively communicate, and ultimately target scarce resources to their best effect.

Families with a disabled member

- Parents with disabilities may face additional challenges in securing and retaining employment which provides their family with an adequate family income.

- The disability benefits system is complex and subject to impending wide-ranging review, which will have as yet unknown economic effects on families who rely on these benefits. When these changes are implemented, these families will need considerable support and advice to ensure they are able to access appropriate benefits.
- Support and positive activities have increased in terms of number and transportation accessibility, but joining these services together effectively remains a significant barrier for disabled parents in moving out of poverty, where the cost of accessing these services is an additional barrier.
- Disabled children who live in poverty face multiple additional risks and further stigma.

Circumstances

Rapidly changing circumstances have the potential to draw families towards poverty. For example:

- efforts to escape violence can have devastating economic impacts. Leaving a relationship might mean a woman will lose her job, housing, health care, child care, or access to her partner's income
- legislation, policy, services and advocacy often focus on physically separating the woman and her children from the abusive partner, but do not guarantee a home, food, health care or an opportunity for long-term financial stability
- families where a parent is imprisoned will also suffer a similarly rapid change of circumstances which can begin a move towards poverty.
- available advice, guidance and support from a network of key services at the time when changes are taking place will support families who are adjusting to changing or challenging circumstances.

Section 2: Experiences of Poverty

Stories of real life poverty in North Somerset, March 2011

Based on discussions in March 2011, the following 3 real life situations are described. The different scenarios outline the complexity of issues where poverty is present.

Case study 1

Mother living in relative poverty with additional needs – South Locality

A woman was introduced to Citizens Advice Bureau. The woman had learning difficulties, low skills, and no qualifications. She has never had a job. She had recently spent some time in escaping domestic violence. Her partner had just been arrested for selling drugs – his attempt to get some ‘quick money to keep the roof over our heads’.

The woman is a mother of several children. The house she was living in was filthy and unfit for human habitation. The children were removed from her care but she was optimistic the children would be returned to her.

The woman sought advice from CAB as she was facing eviction for non payment of rent and other unresolved issues such as cleanliness. Photos of the house where the children had been living showed evidence of both severe neglect and also care.

This vulnerable woman would have been made homeless if she had not sought advice from CAB.

Poverty is not the only issue here. The mother was vulnerable for a number of reasons, of which poverty was only one.

Many questions arise from this case study:

- How can a Child Poverty Strategy support children growing up in this environment?
- How can services prevent these children from becoming poor adults?
- How can schools achieve ambitious attainment targets for pupils who are poor when the home learning environment is so poor?
- How do we enable children like these to have equal life chances?

Case study 2

Father – Central and North Locality

A father from an “affluent” area of North Somerset presented to CAB facing the following set of circumstances.

He has always been financially independent and never before experienced financial hardship. His business has collapsed and he has been unable to pay the mortgage for some time. The family home was facing repossession.

His three children are eligible for free school meals but the father will not register his children for them as he does not want his children to be called ‘scab’. When budget planning, the father said cutting the children’s pocket money was non-negotiable as his children needed a certain amount of money to be able to socialise with friends at school and in the local community.

He would rather lose his house than have his children stigmatised at school or in the community.

This example outlines the true cost and danger of perceived stigma affecting some of our communities.

Many questions arise from this case study:

- How can this Child Poverty Strategy address stigma?
- How can benefits be de-stigmatised
- How can school and community remove financial pressure on children?
- How can services work together to support children when families are at risk of eviction?

Case study 3

A parent – 18 years on

A parent has been on benefits since she left school with no qualifications. When her child became 16, her benefits reduced. She found employment which didn’t last very long, and got into debt as she was unable to budget and couldn’t manage to pay her own housing costs. She lost her home as she was unable to make the payments without the extra benefits she received for her daughter.. So she moves in with her teenage daughter who is pregnant with her second child. The daughter is on benefits and living in social housing and so far has never had a job....

Questions which arise from this case study:

- How can a Child Poverty Strategy break inter-generational poverty?
- How can we raise aspirations?
- How can financial support avoid evictions?

What do children say and feel about living in poverty?

National sources

In March 2011, Maggie Atkinson, Children's Commissioner for England, spoke about a recent national consultation¹⁸ exercise on child poverty.

According to the study, children and young people consulted did not use the terms 'poverty' or 'poor' but words like 'struggling' or 'having a lower income'. These are the words of a girl from Selby in North Yorkshire:

"Young people are the hardest hit. They are going to end up stuck in a cycle of poverty because they can't get the education ... they can't get the jobs ... and it's just going to continue with generations of poverty because they can't escape from it, and ... something must be done to stop that, ... or the people who are poor aren't going to be looked after by the other people ... Unless something changes then it is going to be stuck like this for generations."

Other findings included that many children and young people are concerned that children living in poverty:

- miss out on education and training opportunities due to a lack of funds
- are disadvantaged by lack of basic equipment such as books and pens
- do not have a warm place to study at night, if their accommodation is substandard or overcrowded.

This causes stress in their lives. Children and young people living in these circumstances:

- lack self esteem and self motivation
- face being stigmatised, e.g. for having to take up free school meals.

Reasons for this which were mentioned include things that others might take for granted, such

as being able to:

- take part in leisure activities
- wear brand clothing and avoid being singled out on non-uniform days
- pay for social activities
- host a friend to stay over night
- go on school trips or holidays away from home.

The study also identified what support children and young people wanted, which included:

- a sensitive and flexible benefit system
- far wider access to free or subsidised transport
- employers going the extra mile to provide greater, better publicised and funded opportunities for children and young people whose lives are hard.

The Prince's Trust has also undertaken national consultation work on child poverty¹⁹. A sample of 2,311 16 to 24 year-olds took part in the online poll conducted by You Gov on behalf of The Prince's Trust in March and April 2011. The report revealed a clear gap in aspirations of the UK's richest and poorest young people. Young people growing up in poverty are significantly less likely to believe their life and career goals are achievable. Key findings included:

- More than one in five of those from deprived homes (22%) believe that "few" or "none" of their goals in life are achievable, compared to just 5% of those from affluent families
- More than one in four young people growing up in poverty (26%) believe that "few" or "none" of their career goals are achievable, compared to just 7% of those from wealthy families
- One in four young people from poor homes (26%) feel that "people like them don't succeed in life"

¹⁸Trying to get by: Consulting with Children and Young People About Poverty Report, March 2011. http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/press_release/content_416

¹⁹The Princes Trust, May 2011, Broke, not Broken: Tackling Youth Poverty and the Aspiration Gap

- A clear majority of all respondents (78%), including those from affluent and poor homes, agree that finding a good job is a key priority for the future.

According to The Prince's Trust Report, young people living in poverty are more likely to grow up feeling stressed and depressed, as well as facing bullying from their peers. Key facts relating to this point included:

- More than one in four young people from the UK's poorest families (28%) have been bullied about their clothes, whilst almost one in ten (9%) have faced bullying about their home
- They are six times more likely to feel that "everyone puts them down" and more than three times as likely to feel depressed "all" or "most" of the time than those growing up in wealthy families
- These young people are also more than twice as likely to feel they "don't have anything to get up for in the morning".

Since 2002, Ridge has undertaken a number of qualitative studies about the lives and experiences of children living in poverty, which provide an opportunity to identify and understand some of the issues and realities from a child-centred perspective. These are examined below:

1. Children's access to economic and material resources:

- Pocket money was a scarce resource but when available enabled children to share in the everyday culture of their friends
- Paid work was a necessary resource and used to enable participation with other children and young people
- Pocket money and earned wages are used to purchase important signifiers of childhood social status – e.g. clothes, trainers
- Affordable transport is especially vital if they are vulnerable to social isolation.



2. Fitting in and joining in:

- Peer relationships play a critical role in children's lives in the development of social identity.

Bullying was a significant issue for these children.

Being able to wear adequate and suitable clothing was important – it enables them to avoid stigma.

Schools do not provide them with a sufficiently inclusive environment for their needs. Problems identified were:

- Bullying
- Structural exclusion from shared activity through financial hardship
- Over half were not going on school trips with their peers
- Some self-excluded, feeling the cost was too high to approach their parents
- Material costs limited their learning costs – project costs and exams.

3. Childhood poverty and social exclusion – issues identified:

- The importance of affordable transport was critical – especially in rural areas
- Children's own money, pocket money or paid work, is spent on fitting in with peers
- Friendships made at school are hard to sustain beyond the school day
- Having adequate and 'right' clothes are particularly important in terms of fitting in
- School uniform is a challenge and not always as protective as intended
- Non-school uniform days are more of a pressure
- Considerable constraints on children's ability to fully take part in school life – school trips, outings
- The cost of participating at school, bags, stationery, study guides

- An impoverished social environment in term of leisure activities. Transport exacerbates this
- Holidays away are an important part of family life, but very restricted.

Local sources

There are some useful examples of recent local consultations with Children and Young People, which touch on the experience of child poverty and its effects.

North Somerset Connexions has undertaken significant consultation with young people through its Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG) service. 2008 research on youth support refers to comments made by young people about jobs and their futures. Some young people are able to talk in depth about their future, whilst other young people found it much more difficult to focus on anything but the present. In general, the more vulnerable the young person, the harder they found it to focus on their aspirations for the future. The most common issues raised by young people included:

- Good jobs locally including Saturday and all year round jobs
- Access to a college in the North of North Somerset
- A career is important to some
- Affordable housing
- Financial security
- Better shopping locally
- Having a family
- Having an adult social life.

The North Somerset Youth Parliament met in February 2011 to highlight key areas of interest to them. A priority was to improve the reliability and reduce the cost of public transport to young people, alongside ensuring that young people have a greater say in how schools and local communities are run.

In March 2011, a group of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds produced a video (with the help of V-Involve) examining whether there was enough for teenagers to do in Weston-super-Mare. The video highlighted the need for more access to safe, indoor spaces which didn't involve alcohol. They also highlighted the challenges that vulnerable young people have in accessing stable housing and employment after leaving the care system – in terms of the challenge of having to pay very high rent if employment is secured.



Summer 2010 Barnardo's Consultation²⁰

In the summer of 2010, Barnardo's North Somerset undertook a consultation exercise involving 26 schools and 437 children on behalf of the Children and Families Partnership. The aims of this consultation were not specifically on the topic of 'Child Poverty', but to more broadly advise the North Somerset Children's Trust Management Board on the priorities of children and young people in North Somerset. Key priorities identified included:

- Overall they want to have a 'good start in life', achieve enough through school to have access to higher education and then a reasonable job, income and standard of housing. On the other hand, a level of anxiety amongst young people was expressed that they will not have jobs, access to higher education or affordable housing as previous generations have had.
- Easy access to a variety of quality positive activities. The lack of affordable public transport is seen as a barrier, particularly in rural areas. Some concerns were raised regarding the quality of sports facilities in North Somerset.
- The reputation of themselves and their local community. They are also concerned about the reputation of young people and society's image of teenagers.
- The importance of family and friends, and their safety and wellbeing.
- The environment, global warming and litter in the parks and on the beaches.
- Children and young people with disabilities also raised accessibility issues to leisure facilities, and to the local beaches in particular.

Recommendations:

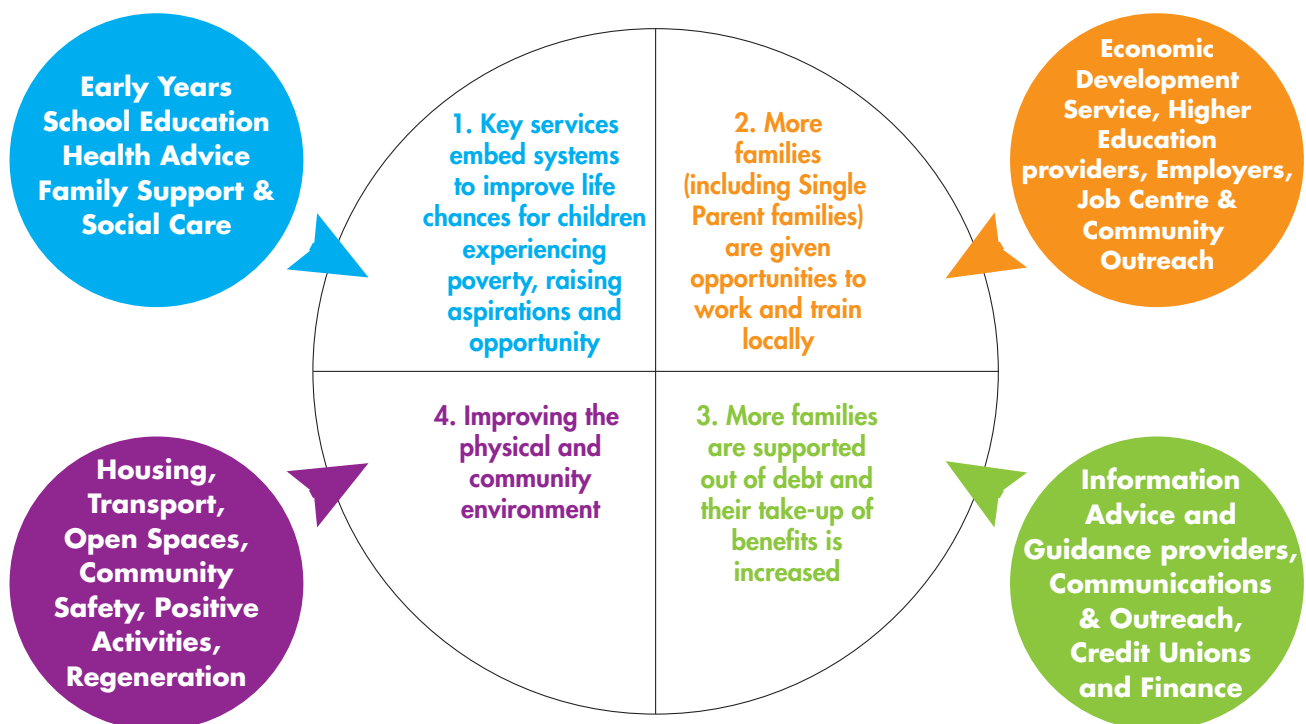
3. All services, including schools, will further develop practical measures to listen to and enable the voice of vulnerable children and young people living in poverty.
4. Opportunities for children and parents' participation in decisions about services must be strengthened, and we must ensure that such opportunities are genuinely representative of groups and areas where poverty is experienced
5. Performance against these recommendations will be annually monitored and reviewed to ensure evidence-based practice.

²⁰ For further information please see the Children and Families Partnership Plan <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/B3EBOC66-AD5A-454C-8A33-CA277B88C485/0/Partnershipplanforchildrenandfamilies201114.pdf>

Section 3: Pathways out of Poverty for Children in North Somerset

What can we do to enable poor children to be financially independent adults?

Four pathways out of poverty have been identified in this strategy, as detailed in the diagram below²¹. These pathways highlight key things that need to happen for children, young people and their families to get out of poverty.



Pathway 1. Improving life chances through services working directly with children

This pathway focuses on the central role of services working directly with children to improve their life chances and raising aspirations, such as Early Years, School Education and Health. For more vulnerable families, family support and children’s social care is also considered.

Pathway 2. Increasing opportunities for parents and young people to work and train locally

This route emphasises the key role of agencies working with families to help them access quality employment. This includes the provision of information, advice and guidance, signposting, higher education and apprenticeships. Critically, this pathway includes specialist provision for single parent families in poverty.

²¹These building blocks have also been identified in Child Poverty Unit’s work on identifying poverty drivers.



Pathway 3. Promoting financial inclusion

This pathway highlights the importance of services to provide information, advice and guidance for debt problems and to increase benefits take-up.

Pathway 4. Improving the physical and community environment

This pathway focuses on services to improve the physical environment in areas of poverty, including improving housing standards, transport, open-spaces and access, promoting community safety and positive activities.

The following sections examine each pathway in turn, identifying needs and things we pledge to do which can make a difference.

Pathway 1 – Improving life chances through services working directly with children and young people

A spotlight on child poverty and education

Children’s attainment is vital to preventing poor children from becoming poor adults, but currently poverty shapes educational outcomes in Britain and particularly in North Somerset.

Educational outcomes for children generally in North Somerset are good. However, there is a significant attainment gap between children who are poor and their more affluent peers. In 2010, at both KS2 and KS4, the attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals in North Somerset is below the South West and National averages.

An important measure of social mobility (as advocated in the new national Child Poverty Strategy) is whether children who are economically disadvantaged can leave school with qualifications, which will broaden their future life chances.



“Closing the widening gap between the richest and the poorest should be our shared goal”, Rt.Hon Michael Gove, MP. May 12th 2010

“The ethical imperative of our education policy is quite simple – we have to make opportunity more equal”, Rt.Hon Michael Gove, MP. June 17th 2010

Children from lower socio-economic groups are at much greater disadvantage at every stage in their educational careers than those from higher socio-economic groups, and the gap is growing. Educational attainment not only determines outcomes in later life but also the likelihood of escaping poverty.

Aspirations, attitudes and behaviour play an important part in explaining why poor children typically do worse at school. Children from poorer backgrounds are much less likely to experience a rich home learning environment than children from better off backgrounds²².

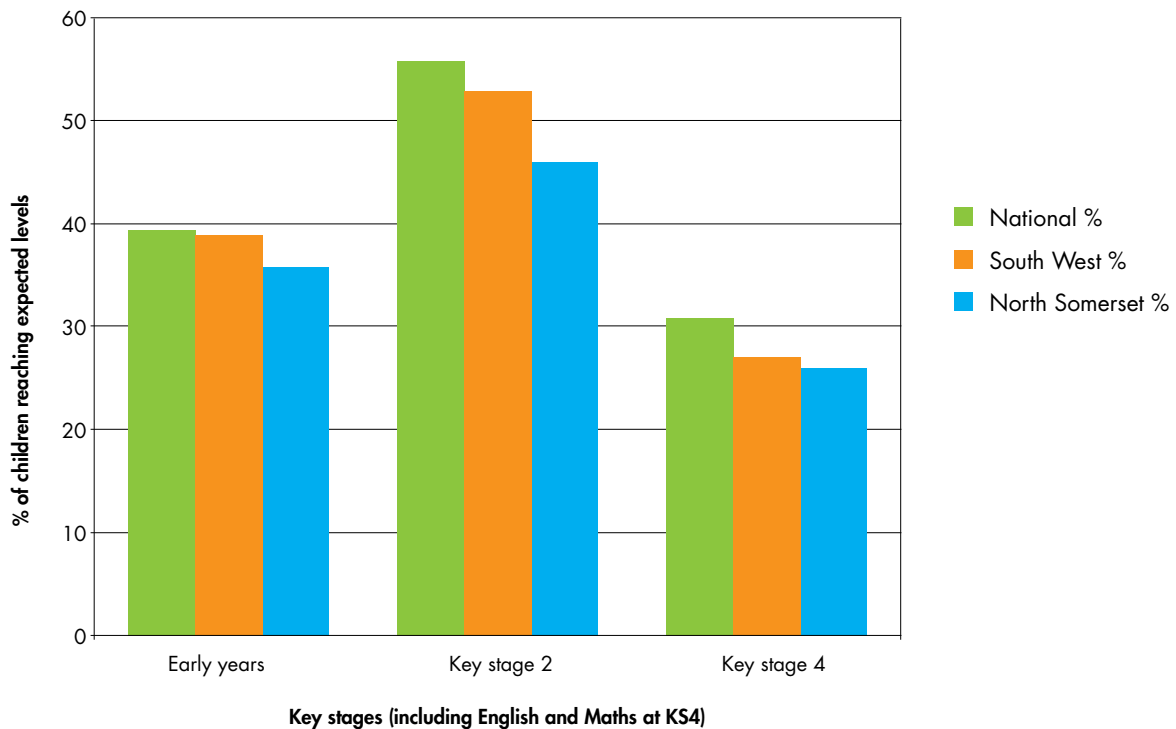
The table below shows the five schools with the highest numbers of children eligible for free school meals in North Somerset: four of the schools are in South Weston.

Primary Schools	All Pupils	Number of free school meal pupils	% FSM pupils	Rank (out of 61 NS Primary Schools)
Windwhistle	406	202	50%	1
Bournville	296	146	49%	2
Walliscote	283	105	37%	3
Becket	203	71	35%	4
Oldmixon	203	66	33%	5

²²Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010, Education and Poverty Investigations Summary, <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/education-poverty-investigations.pdf>

The table below shows the attainment data over the last four years for children aged 11. It compares the results of children who are eligible for free school meals compared to children who are not eligible at a North Somerset and national level.

2010 attainment data for pupils eligible for free school meals



Key Stage 2 trend comparison data (2011 data unverified)

Year	National FSM attainment %	North Somerset FSM %	Difference %	Nat Non FSM %	NS Non FSM %	Difference %	National attainment gap %	NS attainment gap %	Difference %
2008	54	48	-6	77	76	-1	23	28	-5
2009	54	53	-1	76	75	-1	22	22	inline
2010	56	46	-10	77	76	-1	21	30	-9
2011		55			79			24	

The 2011 attainment data for children who are eligible for free school meals shows an increase of 9% on last year. In addition, the attainment gap in North Somerset reduced by 6%.

2011 data shows a significant shift in the right direction and reflects the work across North Somerset that has gone in towards addressing this issue with urgency. However, there is still a lot of work to do to ensure that educational outcomes for children who live in poverty are equitable with their contemporaries

National comparison data for 2011 results is not expected until November 2011.

The table below shows the attainment data over the last three years for children aged 16. It compares the results of children who are eligible for free school meals compared to children who are not eligible at a North Somerset and national level.

Data for 2011 GCSE results is not expected until October/November 2011.

Key Stage 4 trend comparison data (including English and maths)

Year	National FSM attainment %	North Somerset FSM %	Difference %	Nat Non FSM %	NS Non FSM %	Difference %	National attainment gap %	NS attainment gap %	Difference %
2008	24	16	-8	52	53	+1	28	37	-9
2009	27	19	-8	55	55	Inline	28	36	-8
2010	31	26	-5	59	59	Inline	28	33	-5
2011	Not known yet								

The Government is demanding that schools do more to raise attainment for pupils who are eligible for free school meals. They have committed an additional £430 per child through Pupil Premium Funding (which is expected to rise over the next few years). This funding is allocated directly to schools on the number of pupils who are registered for free school meals. The Department of Education will publish attainment data for pupils who are eligible for free school meals from 2011.

The Strategic Schools Forum has distributed £900,000 for schools to use for early intervention work

OfSTED has also recently raised expectations for schools to reduce attainment differences, and intends to implement the following into inspection frameworks²³:

“Persistent low attainment makes it harder for young people to get jobs or access further and higher education, and can have a deep and damaging impact on families and communities. It is therefore important that schools reduce differences in attainment between groups in the school, including those between looked after children, pupils from different social and ethnic groups and between boys and girls. The new inspection framework will pay particular attention to such gaps in attainment and inspectors will look at what is being done to close them.

We propose to develop value-added information for particular groups of pupils, looking, for example, at... the comparative achievements of different social.....groups. We intend to ensure that inspectors are enabled to identify learners from particular groups who have done very well or underperformed, to promote more detailed discussion about their performance....”

From 2011, the Government plans to publish data of pupils eligible for free school meals.

²³See, <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Documents-by-type/Consultations/Inspection-2012-proposals-for-inspection-arrangements-for-maintained-schools-and-academies-from-January-2012>

Over the last 18 months, raising the attainment gap has become a focus of improvement for the Local Authority.

- A Senior School Improvement post was created in July 2010 and has now become part of the Learning Exchange.
- North Somerset has used The Economic Disadvantage Subsidy, (£522,000), renamed 'Join Up Join In' (JUJI), in conjunction with wider core extended services, to tackle child poverty by targeting the under achievement of children experiencing economic disadvantage.

The aim of 'Join Up Join In' (JUJI) has been to narrow the gap in attainment and well being for children disadvantaged through economic circumstances. It enables exciting ways to engage and motivate children with extended learning opportunities outside of school hours. From April 2011 this funding has been subsumed into core school budgets and can continue to be used to support children who are eligible for free school meals.

Children in poverty were identified as not accessing informal learning opportunities and were often de-selecting themselves from out of school activities. Barriers to engagement (perceived and real), were accompanied by low expectations and low aspirations. A direct correlation was made between children who did not participate in any informal learning activities and under achievement

The main thrust of the approach has been to facilitate discussions with school clusters about the reasons for the attainment gap in their area and how these might be addressed. This has enabled schools to open up a dialogue between child, parent and school. Tailored to individuals, it has allowed school staff to find out what children really want to discover, accomplish and achieve. This is strengthened by awareness that pupils whose parents are supportive and engaged with their school and their child's learning are more likely to perform better than those who are not.

Current evaluation data shows that over 75% of pupils eligible for free school meals have taken up the opportunity to increase their access to informal learning opportunities.

See the following case study on Join Up Join In for more information.



Case study: Join Up Join In

Banwell Primary School – Helen Burge, School Bursar

We currently have 68 children eligible for FSM. Over 90% of the eligible children have taken up Join Up Join In funding and enjoyed extended learning opportunities outside of school hours.

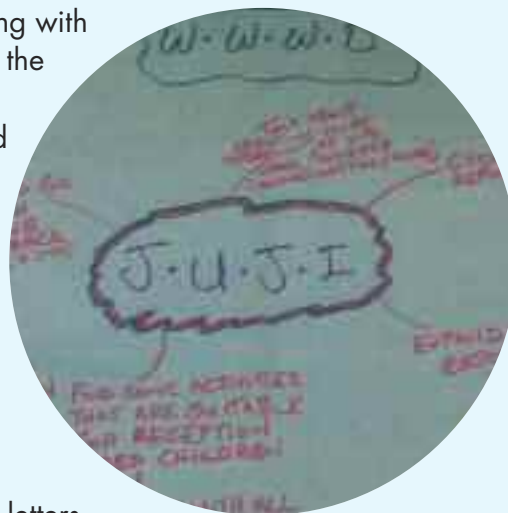
I introduced Join Up Join In at Banwell School by sharing with teachers and support staff the FSM attainment data via the "Who Wants to be a Millionaire? PowerPoint provided by the Senior Adviser for Vulnerable Groups. I included the school's data, so direct comparison to our reality at Banwell School could be made.

Teachers asked their class via circle time, what activities children took part in after school. They noticed a direct correlation between the children who didn't access any positive activities and low attainment in English and maths.

At the beginning, we noticed FSM children were de-selecting themselves from attending clubs by not taking letters home about after school clubs as they feared there was a cost involved. We're still educating the children to take the letter home and have seen some improvements in response rates. We have spent a great deal of time ringing parents and talking to them about positive activities their children might like to do. The children are now talking to their friends about the activities and then their friend's parents are coming into the office wanting to know more.

It's too early to show in the attainment data any reduction in the attainment gap, but we've received very positive feedback from children and parents expressing feelings of well-being; for example I had a lovely letter from a historically hard to reach family that previously really haven't engaged with the school. They absolutely loved the family day trip we organised, and asked to be included in future similar events.

On a personal note, this has to be one of the most positive and rewarding aspects of my job.



Recommendations:

6. Raise attainment for vulnerable children, particularly those who are eligible for free school meals by:
 - collaborative working with schools to set ambitious targets
 - assigning a Children and Young People Learning Exchange Lead Advisor for vulnerable groups to raise awareness of the Child Poverty Strategy within schools and school improvement, coordinate new Learning and Exchange networks. Work should include addressing stigma and social exclusion
 - training and workshops for schools and governing bodies to raise awareness of child poverty, and to develop strategies to improve outcomes
 - developing a multi-agency Strategic Group and working party that has a remit for improving outcomes for children and young people in poverty
 - developing and sharing an intelligence base of evidence on 'what works' to raise attainment for this group of children.

Pathway 1 – Improving life chances through services working directly with children and young people

A spotlight on child poverty and Early Years

The Government has recently published several policy documents, which emphasise the importance of Early Years services for 0-5s in improving the life chances of poor children. These include:

- Frank Field (2011) – The Foundation years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults²⁴
- Dame Clare Tickell (2010) – The Early Years: Foundations for Life, Health and learning²⁵
- Graham Allen and Iain Duncan Smith (2011) – Early Intervention: Next Steps²⁶.

To focus in particular on the Field review, Field was commissioned by the Government to provide an independent review on poverty and life chances. The question the review asked was, “how can we prevent poor children from becoming poor adults?”

The review found overwhelming evidence that children’s life chances are most heavily predicated on their development in the first five years of life:

“It is family background, parental education, good parenting and opportunities for learning and development in those crucial years that together matter more than money in determining whether the potential is realised in adult life” (Field, 2011, p5)

Field is convinced there are factors which matter more than money in determining a child’s future. For example Field notes, “poor Chinese children achieve more than all other children apart from rich Chinese children” (Field, 2011, p17).

By school age, there are very wide variations in children’s ability profiles in terms of cognitive,

language and emotional and social development. There is clear evidence that children from poorer backgrounds do worse cognitively than those from more affluent homes (Field, 2011:5). Field concludes that a shift of focus is needed towards providing high quality, integrated services aimed at supporting parents and improving the abilities of our poorest children during the period when it is most effective to do so (conception to year 5). Field’s review is taken into account in the Government’s Child Poverty Strategy.

Such conclusions are supported by Tickell’s report to the Minister for Children and Families (2010):

“The earliest years in a child’s life are absolutely critical. There is overwhelming international evidence that foundations are laid in the first years of life which, if weak, can have a permanent and detrimental impact on children’s longer term development” (Tickell, 2010, p2).

Tickell also recommends that greater emphasis is given to the role of parents as partners in their children’s early years learning, including providing on request to parents and carers, at some point between the ages of 24 – 36 months, a short written early years summary of their child’s development.

The Allen review notes the importance of early intervention in children’s early years:

“the general approaches, and the specific policies and programmes, which help to give children aged 0–3 the social and emotional bedrock they need to reach their full potential; and to those which help older children become the good parents of tomorrow” (Allen, 2011: xiii)

²⁴<http://www.frankfield.co.uk/media/press-releases/q/date/2010/12/03/a-new-strategy-to-abolish-child-poverty/>

²⁵<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/F/The%20Early%20Years%20Foundations%20for%20life%20health%20and%20learning.pdf>

²⁶<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/early-intervention-next-steps.pdf>

Allen (2011) suggests that early intervention is essential, as “major social problems have got worse not better: despite heroic frontline efforts tackling the symptoms, their causes often remain unaddressed” (Allen, 2011: 3). Instead Allen advocates:

“the right type of Early Intervention programmes, those that build social and emotional capabilities, have resulted in significant and sustainable improvements in health, behaviour and social and economic outcomes. They offer immediate rewards to individuals and local communities and the prospect of lasting gains to society and the economy. Because of the huge costs of late intervention it does not take long for the right Early Intervention programmes to more than pay back their costs many times over...” (Allen, 2011: 4)

The focus on support for early years and early intervention crosses all political parties and is backed up by international evidence.

The Effective Provision Of Pre-School Education (EPPE) first major Longitudinal European study in 2003 (pre-school to end of year 1) showed:

- disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences – especially where they are with a mixture of children from other social backgrounds
- there are significant differences between individual pre-school settings and their impact on children. Quality was found to be higher overall in settings integrating care and education and in nursery schools
- the importance of the home learning environment – for all children, the quality of the home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income²⁷.

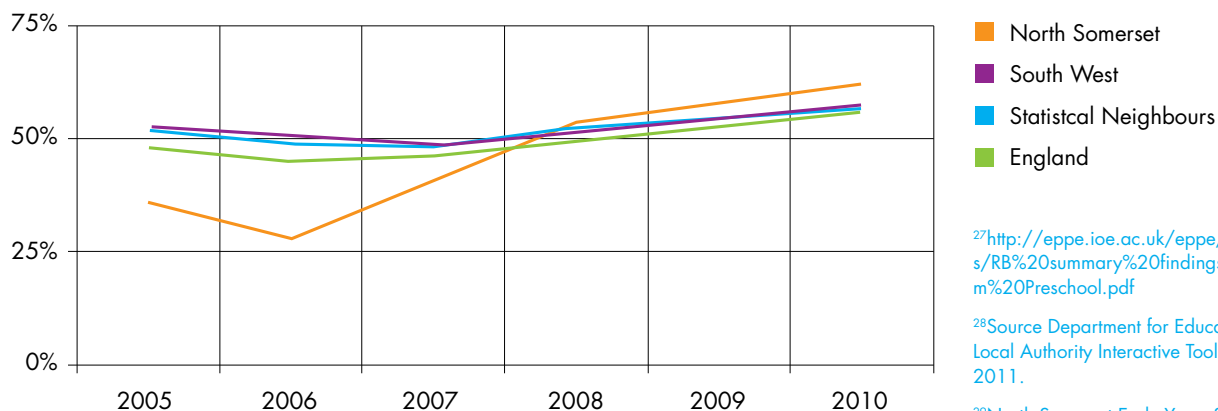
How do young children perform in North Somerset compared to others?

Most children in North Somerset achieve a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Attainment for five year olds is significantly above the national average and is also above our statistical neighbours.²⁸

The lowest achieving children in North Somerset in 2011 in the EYFSP are:

- Firstly, children with SEN, of which there are 164 children
- Secondly, children on Free School Meals, of which there are 296 or 13% of the overall cohort of children in North Somerset. These children perform less well than other children nationally who are on free school meals.²⁹

78 points achieved across foundation stage with at least 6 points in each scale



²⁷<http://epps.ioe.ac.uk/epps/eppsdfs/RB%20summary%20findings%20from%20Preschool.pdf>

²⁸Source Department for Education Local Authority Interactive Tool, March 2011.

²⁹North Somerset Early Years Service

Whilst overall Foundation Stage Profile Scores look higher than average in North Somerset, attainment gaps between the lowest 20% of achievers and the rest remains a particular challenge. The gap between the attainment scores of the lowest 20% achievers and the rest are in line with national averages, but wider than elsewhere in the South West and comparable Statistical Neighbour authorities.

Children's Centres

There are now 14 Children's Centres across North Somerset and levels of need have been a key consideration in their locations and staffing levels. Children's Centres are run by North Somerset Council, but services are commissioned from Health and the Community sector.

Our Children's Centres offer a key vehicle for providing early intervention directly and universally in areas of identified need, reflecting the core purpose of improving outcomes and narrowing gaps (DfE, 2011). All children's centres **must** offer:



- child and family health services, ranging from health visitors to breastfeeding support
- if high quality childcare and early learning – those that don't can help advise on local childcare options
- advice on parenting, local childcare options and access to specialist services for families like speech therapy, healthy eating advice or help with managing money
- help to find work or training opportunities, using links to local Jobcentre Plus offices and training providers.

Future delivery of services to address the challenge of child poverty should focus on the Children's Centre as a key point of delivery and may include a range of other services either drawn from across our existing partnerships, or commissioned from the private or civil sector to meet specific local needs.

The revised core purpose of Children Centres is:

- Child development and school readiness – supporting communication, physical and social development so that children start school confident and ready to learn.
- Parenting aspirations and parenting skills – helping parents to maximise their skills and give their children the best start
- Child and family health and life chances – promoting good physical and mental health for children and their parents including addressing risk factors early on.

Recommendations:

7. Protect and further develop Local Authority investment in universal Early Years services through:
 - weighting resources to the most disadvantaged children
 - encouraging and supporting the ambitious use of Children's Centres to support vulnerable families, encouraging co-location of a wide range of services including voluntary and civil society partners
 - using evidence-based parenting programmes

Pathway 1 – Improving life chances through services working directly with children and young people

A spotlight on child poverty and health

Growing up in poverty has severe adverse health outcomes for many children. There is recognition of a social gradient in health – the lower a person’s social position, the worse his or her health. Given that health inequalities often result from social inequalities, action should focus on reducing the gradient in health. Action on health inequalities requires action across all the social determinants of health (Marmot, 2010³⁰).

Locally, there are persistent inequalities in health experienced by different groups of people in North Somerset; children living in deprived areas are significantly more likely to have low birth weight, not be breastfed, be missing immunisations and grow up obese. Certain groups are at increased risk of poverty including families with a disabled member, lone parents, large families and workless families.

The Annual Public Health Report 2010 commits to reducing health inequalities by working together with local communities, and targeting efforts where there is evidence of effectiveness. It aims to strengthen and consolidate joint work through the North Somerset Partnership and focus efforts where it can make a difference.

Groups who are more vulnerable to poorer health outcomes include those who are homeless, Gypsy Roma and Travellers, people with mental health conditions, Looked After Children and those with learning disabilities.

What is the outcome for poor children in North Somerset?

North Somerset has the widest gap in life expectancy in the South West and a bigger gap

	Most Affluent 20% Life Expectancy	Least Affluent 20% Life Expectancy
Male	83	74
Female	85	79

than the England average. The difference between the most affluent 20% and most deprived 20% of the population in life expectancy for 2007-9 was 9 years for Men and 6 years for Women³¹.

This gap has arisen because life expectancy has risen faster in the more affluent areas than it has in the least affluent areas.

Data from the National Child Measurement programme shows obesity rates in both Reception and Year 6 children in the most deprived areas are significantly higher than in the most affluent areas. There has been no significant change in this gap in the last 15 years

Hospital admissions for illicit drug use in the most deprived areas are 10 times higher than in affluent areas.

Using National Health survey data, it is estimated that 40% of people in Weston smoke compared with 10% in Clevedon Walton.

Breastfeeding rates at 6 weeks are significantly higher in affluent groups at 62% compared with the most deprived groups which are 35%.

For further information and data on this topic, please see the North Somerset NHS Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2010³² or Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2011³³.

³⁰Marmot, 2010, Fair Society. Healthy Lives, Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England 2010, <http://www.marmotreview.org/AssetLibrary/pdfs/Reports/FairSocietyHealthyLivesExecSummary.pdf>

³¹ONS Mortality Files, IMD 2007 income domain, Annual Report of the NHS Director of Public Health 2010, North Somerset

³² www.northsomerset.nhs.uk/PublicHealth/PublicHealth_report/Public_Health_report.../DPH%20Annual%20Report%202010.pdf

³³<http://www.northsomersetpartnership.co.uk/news/jointstrategicneedsassessment1.asp>

Teenage parents and their children

Teenage parent families, by their nature, have at least one parent under the age of 18 with responsibility for a dependent child who is likely to be under 5 years. These families are at increased risk of poverty; worklessness and low pay,³⁴. As a result, children of teenage mothers have a 63% increased risk of being born into poverty compared to babies born to mothers in their twenties³⁵.

Teenage pregnancy, follows intergenerational cycles with children born into poverty at increased risk of teenage pregnancy, especially for young women living in workless households when aged 11-15³⁶. The majority of teenage parents and their children live in deprived areas and often exhibit multiple risk factors for poverty, experiencing poor health, social and economic outcomes and inter-generational patterns of deprivation.

Teenagers who become pregnant are more likely to drop out of school, leading to low educational attainment and no or low-paying, insecure jobs without training. Young mothers are also more likely to be lone parents with their children raised in a home with one income and often living in sub-standard housing or temporary accommodation.

These factors mean teenage mothers and their children need support. Sustaining a multi-agency approach to addressing teenage pregnancy can contribute to a reduction in child poverty in the following ways:

- Reductions in births to mothers under 18 and prevention of under 18 conceptions. Reducing the birth rate to teenage parents by 20% would prevent 50,000 children being born into poverty³⁷.

- Low educational attainment is strongly associated with higher rates of teenage pregnancy, even after accounting for deprivation³⁸. The signs of disengagement from school are often evident long before pregnancy occurs. Prevention strategies should put measures in place to identify and support these young women.
- Support for teenage parents to increase their employability through access to education, training and employment (ETE). Reducing barriers to ETE is key to this, in particular ensuring the availability of rolling and introductory programmes of study which have flexible hours and take account of the demands of caring for a child, paid childcare which is flexible, non-judgemental³⁹, as well as accessible transport etc.

A lead professional who can help to broker arrangements with schools, colleges etc can make the difference in encouraging young mothers back into Education, Employment and Training (EET).

- Measures to address repeated cycles of teenage pregnancy by challenging cultural norms of the inevitability of teenage parenthood and raising aspirations for employment amongst young people, families and communities. Addressing cultural resistance, in some deprived communities, to young mothers going to college and using formal childcare is also important.
- Reducing health inequalities is integral to sustaining all of these measures.

³⁴ DWP (2008) 'Ending child poverty: everybody's business.

³⁵ Mayhew E and Bradshaw J (2005) 'Mothers, babies and the risks of poverty' Poverty, No.121 p13-16.

³⁶ Ermisch, J., Francesconi, M and Pevalin, D. J. 2001) 'The outcomes for poverty of children' DWP Research Report 15.

³⁷ Child Poverty Unit (2008) analysis of DWP 2020 model.

³⁸ DfES (2006) Teenage Pregnancy Next Steps: Guidance for Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts on Effective Delivery of Local Strategies.

³⁹ Dench S, and Bellis A (2007) Learning for Young Mothers A qualitative study of flexible provision Report 441, Institute for Employment Studies, July 2007 ISBN: 978-1-85184-386-2, pp. xiv+69.

The National target is to reduce teenage conceptions by 50% by 2010 since the 1998 baseline year, in North Somerset the under18 conception rate has fallen by -2.5% compared with England -18.1%.

The provisional under-18 conception rate for North Somerset is now 34.8 per 1000 girls aged 15-17 (equates to 123 conceptions) compared to 33.1 in 2008 (equates to 118 conceptions) this is lower than the rate for England 38.2 but higher than the South West rate 32.4.

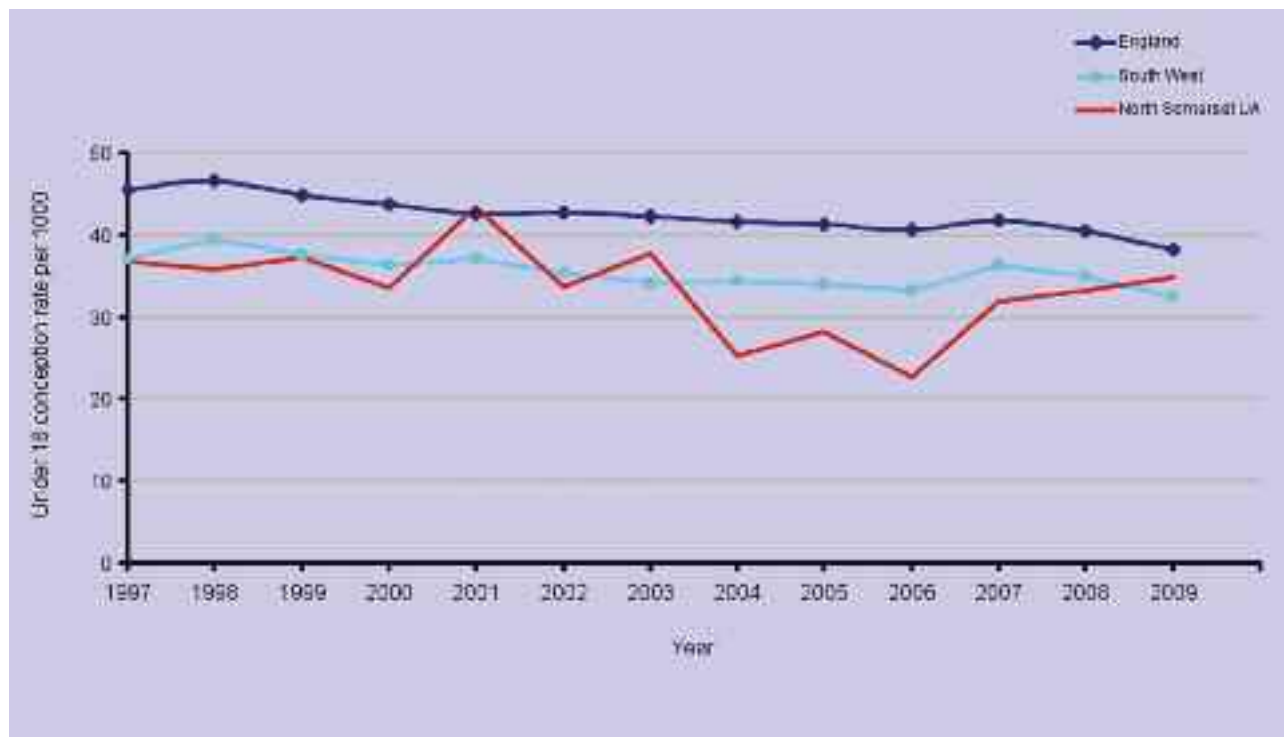
North Somerset has the 50th lowest teenage conception rate compared with all other local authorities based on the rate per 1000 girls aged 15-17 years of age in the country.

Key Stats

- Children of teenage mothers have a 63% increased risk of being born into poverty

compared to babies born to mothers in their twenties³⁵.

- Teenage mothers are 20% more likely to have no qualifications at age 30 than mothers giving birth aged 24 or over³⁸.
- It is estimated that 70% of teenage mothers aged 16-19 are not in education, training or employment⁴¹
- 70% of mothers aged 16-19 claim Income Support³⁷
- At age 30, teenage mothers are 22% more likely to be living in poverty than mothers giving birth aged 24 or over, and are much less likely to be employed or living with a partner⁴².
- Teenage mothers are more likely to partner with men who are poorly qualified and more likely to experience unemployment.³⁸



⁴⁰ (Fuller E (ed.) (2009). Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2008. Information Centre for Health and Social Care, United Kingdom).

⁴¹ DFES (2007) Teenage Parents, Next Steps: Guidance for Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts.

⁴² Ermisch J (2003) Does a 'teen birth' have longer term impacts on the mother? Suggestive evidence from the British Household Panel Study ISER Working Papers No. 2003-32; Institute for Social and Economic Research.

Smoking

The burden of smoking rests most heavily on those from the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations in our communities and this perpetuates the inequalities faced by those groups. Health inequalities start early in life and persist into old age – and even into subsequent generations. The association between smoking and social disadvantage begins from the early stages of life. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are much more likely to be born to mothers who smoke, and to suffer greater exposure to second-hand smoke as they grow up.

They are also more likely to grow up with family members and friends who smoke. In monetary terms the cost of funding their addiction is significant, a 20 a day smoker will spend more than £1800 on their habit each year, many of these families will buy illegal tobacco which whilst cheaper is still a significant cost both in terms of the impact on household budgets and the additional burden of criminality in terms of communities being targeted by gangs selling illegal tobacco. Smoking is a social norm in many disadvantaged communities.⁴⁰



Recommendations:

8. Deliver preventative work with families in partnership with other agencies (for example, as with the MEND programme for children above a healthy weight, a joint collaboration between the PCT, North Somerset Council and schools).
9. Find ways to collaborate and information share with agencies around individual vulnerable children.
10. Link with Adult Services to address parents' needs for support around addiction, mental health, healthy eating and smoking, to model better health behaviour for vulnerable children.
11. Following the review of the North Somerset Partnership, the emerging People and Communities Board will combine the strategic functions of the Children and Families Partnership, Health and Wellbeing, and Safer Stronger Communities Boards. This group will be committed to developing and ensuring delivery of a unified People and Communities Plan, which includes a specific chapter detailing a partnership response to Child Poverty.

Pathway 2 – Increasing opportunities for parents and young people to work and train locally

A spotlight on parental employment – supporting families to achieve financial independence

Paid work is usually seen as the key route out of poverty.

The Government believes that work not welfare is the best route out of poverty and that all families, where possible should benefit from the opportunities of work. Work is a key principle of the new national Child Poverty Strategy.

Working families are also affected by poverty and currently, 55% of children in poverty are living in working families. There has been little progress in understanding in-work poverty and existing policy tools seem inadequate. A 2010 report showed that the numbers of children living in working households in poverty has increased nationally to 2.1 million, the highest ever level recorded (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008, 2010⁴³).

Joseph Rowntree Foundation recommends that strategies to reduce child poverty should include helping parents into jobs and the following factors:

- adequacy of childcare
- job flexibility for parents
- level of parent skills and
- how these are used by employers to create quality employment.

To support families to become financially independent, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation recommends:

- up skilling of jobs
- flexible working hours
- affordable childcare (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008, 2011).

How many people are unemployed in North Somerset (2010)?

- 15,500 working age adults are unemployed⁴⁴.
- 33% of working age adults in Central and South Ward (Weston) are currently claiming out of work benefits.
- 8,300 individuals across Weston are claiming out of work benefits (Nomis Data, 2010).



⁴³<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/2269-poverty-employment-income.pdf>, <http://www.jrf.org.uk/media-centre/monitoring-poverty-2010>

⁴⁴This is a general overall figure including those who are not parents or carers. The figure for the exact number with children is not available, but other sources in this document show that there were 4,783 Households with dependent children on relative low income in May 2011 (Liberata, 2011).

Employment in North Somerset is currently a challenge (Local Economic Assessment, 2011).

- In North Somerset, there is a 40,000 gap between the number of people who are of working age and the number of jobs.
- This breaks down to 0.67 jobs per working age adult. This is the 7th lowest in the South West and getting worse year on year.
- 60% of adults in North Somerset are commuting to work outside of North Somerset.
- 50% of individuals in South Ward do not have transport.
- There are 8,000 businesses in North Somerset (AB1 2008) – 70% of which employ 4 people or less.
- 30% of businesses are Sole Traders and based at home.
- There are just 60 Companies in North Somerset who employ 100 people or more – 10 of these are supermarkets.
- No major commercial new employment opportunities have been created since 1991 (this was the Worle and Parkway offices).
- 5000 jobs were lost in the 1990s with the closure of Clarks and Westlands employment sites. This number of jobs has not been replaced.
- The proposed Snow Dome and planned Weston-super-Mare Dolphin Square development will potentially create approximately 1,000 jobs.
- The proportion of young people not in education, training or employment (NEET) is lower than the national and statistical neighbour averages. However, in South Weston, the proportion is higher; 9% in 2010, compared to just under 7% nationally and 5.5% for Statistical Neighbours.

The main five sectors of employment in North Somerset include:

- residential care activities – learning disabilities, mental health and substance abuse
- retail and wholesale – particularly around food and drink
- manufacturing
- administration
- education.

The largest four employers in North Somerset are:

- North Somerset Council
- North Somerset NHS
- Weston Hospital
- Bristol Airport.

Barriers to employment

There are a number of identified local barriers to employment, including:

- the location of sustainable quality employment
- cost and reliability of public transport; and
- the cost of childcare (Westonworks Interview 12/2010, DWP, 2011).

Transport

Accessibility to affordable and reliable transport is a challenge for households with children experiencing poverty, particular those in rural areas where households are typically dependent upon private or public transport to access employment, training and leisure, both within North Somerset and elsewhere.

16 and 17 year olds pay full adult prices on buses in North Somerset

Children pay 2/3 of the adult price, not half as is the case in some Local Authorities.

Examples of transport costs:

- Adult return from Banwell to Weston before 9am is £6.55
- Child return from Banwell to Weston before 9am £5.10
- Adult return from Weston to Bristol before 9am is £7.50
- Child return from Weston to Bristol before 9am £5.80.



Recommendations:

12. We will ensure that work to address child poverty takes place across North Somerset Partnership, and extends to ensure we are working closely and sharing responsibility for key outcomes with agencies engaged to deliver services, such as the future provider of European Social Fund (ESF) services to workless families with multiple needs.
13. Ensure the scope of employment advice and support recognises and promotes employment opportunities outside of the local area where there is limited local supply.
14. We will ensure that the experience and incidence of child poverty influences the development of North Somerset Partnership's wider economic assessments and strategies, and that the need to provide employment accessible to parents when encouraging new local enterprises is reflected in these initiatives.
15. Prioritise funding public transport routes to main employment organisations (e.g. Bristol Airport, Council and Health Offices).
16. We will ensure that future procurement of products and services by the Council and its partners encourages and challenges potential suppliers to source materials, resources and the labour force locally, where possible creating opportunities suitable for those working to escape poverty.

Pathway 3 – Promoting financial inclusion

A spotlight on benefits

Having parents who are out of work either through unemployment, disability or caring for dependent relatives is also associated with poverty.

Welfare benefit is currently going through a major change with the intention of moving to a new Universal Credit.

The proposed Universal Credit aims to reduce the complexity of the current benefits system by encompassing Tax Credit, Income Support, Housing Benefit and Job Seekers Allowance. It is the intention to have a maximum benefit cap and currently this is £26,000 for a working age family.

The local Revenues and Benefits Service (Liberata) is working with other agencies in North Somerset to increase take up of benefits. For example, the Benefit Service has strong links with Housing and in particular the Housing Advice Team, where a member of the Benefit Service works to advise and support the public. This can have a real impact on reducing the processing times for customers who find themselves homeless or having issues with landlords that might have an effect on their tenancies. The Benefit Service also works closely with the Landlords' Forum to provide advice and guidance.

Job Centre Plus

The role of Job Centre Plus is to focus on getting individuals into work and sustaining a job. This will bring down the number of people claiming benefit and reduce the number of children who live in poverty.

The Government is introducing changes in how Job Centres operate. It will demand a different relationship with employers. JC Plus will no longer have funding to support employers with work programmes to encourage the long term unemployed back to work, but will be organised on the 'Big Society' principle, with employers taking responsibility.

The role of Job Centre Plus will become more tailored with a responsibility to find roles which suit individual customers and remove them from long term unemployment. It will become a more personalised service.

Job seekers will receive an interview which will rate individuals as:

- red – complex issues to overcome to be work ready
- amber – nearly work ready, with appropriate support provided
- green – work ready.

Support will be allocated on this basis.

When children reach the age of five, parents will transfer from income support to Job Seekers Allowance. The amount of money is the same, but Income Support is perceived as a passive benefit and where as Job Seekers Allowance, assumes claimants are actively seeking employment and can be asked to provide evidence.

It is expected the number of parents on active benefits will increase dramatically.

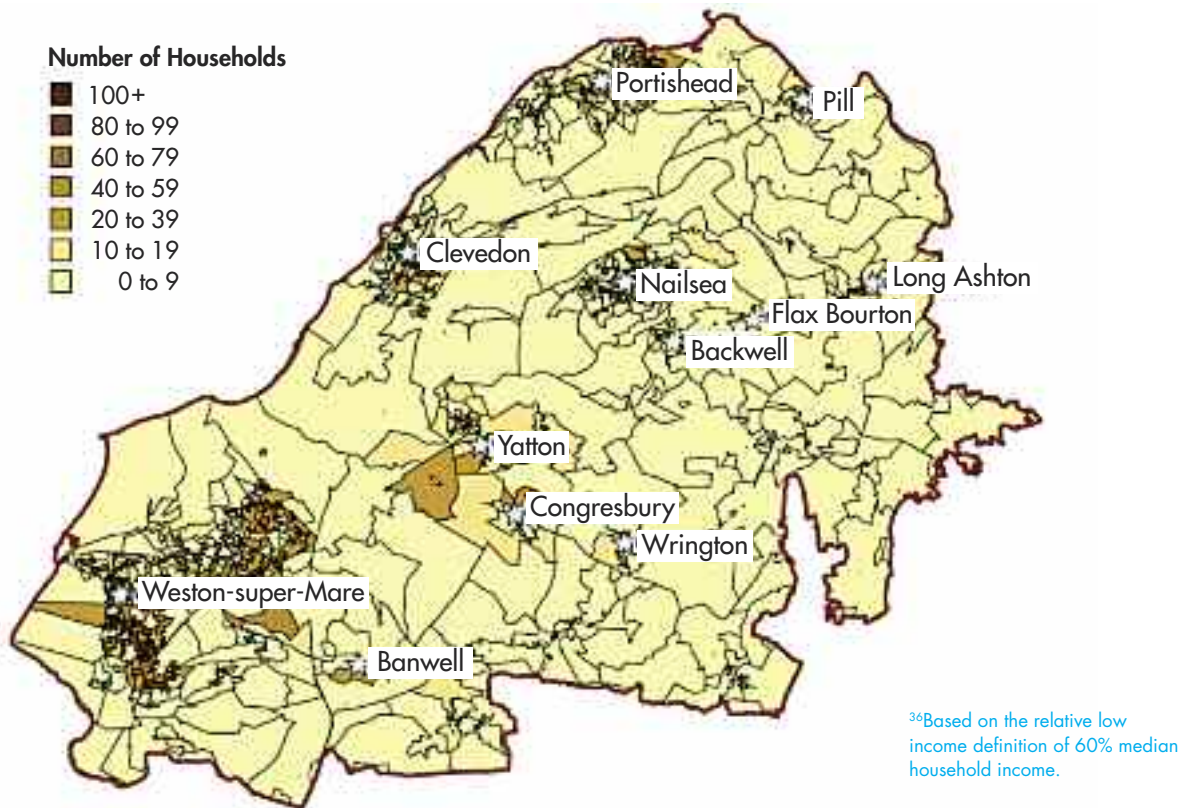
The Government aims that claiming benefits should be a short-term choice. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne said in September 2010:

"People who think it is a lifestyle to sit on out-of-work benefits ... that lifestyle choice is going to come to an end. The money will not be there for that lifestyle choice."

How many adults are claiming benefits in North Somerset?

Currently there are 18,500 individual adults on the Liberate Revenues and Benefits casehold claiming Housing and/or Council Tax benefit. Of those claiming there are 4,783 family households with dependent children.

The following map identifies the numbers of households with dependent children receiving either Council Tax Credit or Housing Benefit, with low incomes equivalent to child poverty thresholds³⁶.



NSCAB

NSCAB is part of the national CA service and has several outlets across North Somerset. The Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice, and by influencing policymakers.

The NSCAB Annual Report for the financial year 2010/2011 showed

- The four biggest enquiry areas were debt, benefits, employment and housing. Debt and benefit enquiries account for a little under 75% of all enquiries.
- 7419 people used nscab for the first time. This indicates that the financial climate is affecting those who were previously unaffected
- Gained £1.25 million in unclaimed/under claimed benefits
- Dealt with 11,526 benefit enquiries and over 12,000 debt enquiries
- Handled total debt of £14.4 million

Debt for low income families is very costly. The “Poverty Premium” briefing by Save the Children and the Family Welfare Association, shows that the cost that poor families bear in acquiring cash and credit and in purchasing goods and services can amount to a poverty premium of around £1000 – 9% of the disposable income of an average size family.

Low income families can pay around 150% more for basic goods due to the lack of affordable credit options. For example, a cooker from Argos bought outright costs £160 but the similar item bought from Brighthouse over 125 weeks would cost £405.

Doorstep lending is one of the most popular forms of borrowing we see in poorer families yet the cost of this is over 50% more. Borrowing £500 on a typical credit card over 52 weeks costs £539. A £500 loan from Provident over 55 weeks costs £835.

Recommendations

17. Improve debt and advice and benefit take up through:
 - the identification and targeting of vulnerable customers
 - improving the availability of on-the-ground outreach services to promote awareness of debt issues and to increase benefit take-up
 - better sharing of benefits-related data between Partners as necessary, to inform Strategy delivery.

Pathway 4 – Improving the physical and community environment

A Spotlight on Housing

‘Housing and Housing Benefit is critical to reducing child poverty’,

Toby Lloyd, Head of Policy, Shelter.

There is a growing body of evidence pointing to the impact that poor housing has on a child. It impacts on children’s health, education and wellbeing. Children most at risk are those with no permanent home and those living in overcrowded and non-decent homes. Recent research by Shelter (2006, 2011) shows how vital adequate housing is on children’s life chances:

- Children living in overcrowded housing are 10 times more likely to contract meningitis than children in general.
- Overcrowding is linked to delayed cognitive development and homelessness to delayed development in communication skills.
- The behavioural problems associated with bad housing can manifest themselves in offending behaviour later in life⁴⁵

The Government is currently making a number of changes to housing policy and benefit caps which are going through parliament, although according to Shelter, “It is too soon to say what the cumulative effect on children will be” (Toby Lloyd, Head of Policy, Shelter)⁴⁶.

What is the Housing situation in North Somerset?

1. Demand For Social and Affordable Housing

With regards to the amount of affordable housing being built, we face a significant challenge for future delivery due to considerable cuts to the capital funding available from government for

the development of new affordable homes. In addition, due to the economic climate, private building levels are very low in North Somerset at the current time. The introduction of the new affordable housing product by government – Affordable Rent – may mitigate the reduction in capital funding for affordable homes however there are concerns that for some households these new homes may not be affordable in the longer term. It is estimated there is currently a need to build 904 affordable homes per year to meet demand in North Somerset, this compares to a current expected delivery of an average of 150 homes per year.

There are currently 9,126 applicants on the HomeChoice register. 7,011 applicants live in North Somerset and of these 4716 are in Bands A – C and have one or more housing need, and 2386 of those households have children under the age of 16. In the last financial year (April 10 – March 11) there were only 701 vacancies advertised via HomeChoice, not all of which are suitable for families. It is clear we face a continued shortfall in the supply of affordable housing in North Somerset to meet the needs of our residents.

Social housing accounts for only 9.4% of all North Somerset housing stock, a small portion of the housing market, particularly in relation to the national average of 17.7%. Consequently North Somerset is heavily reliant on Private Landlords to provide affordable housing, particularly for poorer families. It is estimated that there are 8,000 privately rented homes in North Somerset, but many of these are not accessible to those on low incomes, as set out in section 3, affordability of housing overleaf.

⁴⁵http://england.shelter.org.uk/campaigns/housing_issues/supporting_families_and_children. See also, Shelter England, 2006, *Chance of a Lifetime. The Impact of Bad Housing Upon Children’s Lives*.

⁴⁶Shelter Conference Presentation on Child Poverty, Child Poverty Conference, March 2011, London.

Housing Tenure Mix in North Somerset	North Somerset	National average
Owner Occupied	78.8%	68.3%
Private rented	11.8%	13.9%
Social rented	9.4%	17.7%

2. Housing quality

There are a number of challenges in living in private rented accommodation as a family, including the quality of accommodation and the risk of short term tenancy agreements. Whilst social housing providers are required to ensure properties meet the required “Decent Homes Standard”, this requirement does not apply nationally for private landlords. Whilst private landlords do have a duty to ensure their properties are free from certain hazards, it is harder to regulate the quality of private properties than it is social housing. Serious quality hazards (for example damp) can have severe health implications for the families and children living there.

The council’s strategic housing service plays a fundamental role in regulating the quality of private rented housing. Our approach is to encourage landlords to self-regulate through our accreditation scheme and we focus our regulatory resources on those homes where the highest risks exist. Where necessary, we take enforcement action against landlords to ensure that they work to improve the living conditions in their properties.

The service we provide is universal and is accessible by anybody; however, to help children specifically, the Private Housing Team receives referrals from children’s centres about families living in challenging housing conditions in the private rented sector. When this happens, we arrange for the homes to be inspected and any necessary action is taken. We welcome the opportunity to intervene in tackling these poor housing conditions.

3. Affordability of Housing

On the issue of housing affordability, demand for housing in the private sector is keeping market prices high and unaffordable. It will be difficult for rents to drop in this climate and we must prepare for further increase in prices due to restricted new affordable housing provision.

The overall reduction nationally in the amount of housing benefit that can be claimed by households is reducing the number of available homes for those who are reliant on Housing Benefit. For example 5 out of 10 private properties prior to April 2011 were accessible to those in receipt of Housing Benefit, whilst this has now reduced to 3 out of 10 due to the national changes to housing benefit. The introduction of the Universal Credit in 2013 in its’ current form, would further reduce the number of homes which are affordable for larger families.

Finally, there are currently approximately 35 Homeless families (March 2011), who the council have a legal obligation to house, living in temporary accommodation in North Somerset.

The number of families found to be intentionally homeless is very small. Intentionality focuses on whether a deliberate action or inaction led to the loss of the family home and if such a decision is made, the councils housing service does not have a legal duty to offer accommodation.

When children are involved in decisions of intentionality, referrals are made to Children and Young Peoples Services in order for accommodation needs to be met.

During 2010/11, 187 homelessness decisions (families and people without children) were made and of those, only 7 cases were found to be intentionally homeless. Each case has the right to appeal against an intentional decision and can be assisted with this by various support agencies, including the Citizens Advice Bureau.

4. Children and young people's homelessness

Our 2010 – 2015 Housing Strategy highlighted an increase in the number of young people presenting as homeless and we have developed a strong early intervention and prevention

approach to address this. We have established a joint service between Housing and Children and Young Peoples Services for homeless 16/17 year olds, providing a dedicated Housing Advice Officer for young people. This has enabled around 42% of these young people to return home or to move into other accommodation in a planned way, without the need to use temporary housing. The Housing Advice Officer for Young People also works directly in schools to raise awareness of housing issues and homelessness to prevent potential future problems. In addition, a social worker is situated part-time in the Housing Advice Team, to further focus on tackling children's housing issues.

Recommendations:

18. Continue to work and develop relationships with private landlords to ensure the quality of private rented stock.
19. Support vulnerable families through the complexities of accessing secure and appropriate housing, including the application process.
20. Continue to work with Registered Housing providers to deliver new affordable family housing.



Pathway 4 – Improving the physical environment

A spotlight on crime and antisocial behaviour

It is often assumed that poverty and crime are related in a very direct way, which also serves to add to the stigma encountered by people experiencing poverty. This stigma has impacts at an individual, family and community level and is particularly problematic for children who will often attend school as part of a much more socially or geographically diverse group. Here the stigma is more visible and its effects more tangible.

Families experiencing poverty are more often victims of crime than other families. Overall, areas where more families experiencing poverty live have higher rates of reported crime in North Somerset. This includes drug misuse, youth offending, robbery and anti-social behaviour but also encompasses crimes which cause serious harm to individuals and families such as domestic abuse, violent crime, sexual abuse and child protection matters.

Families where adults are involved in criminal behaviour are at greater risk of poverty.

Where a parent is engaged in criminal behaviour, families are at greater risk of experiencing poverty for two key reasons:

- The potential for imprisonment of the only economically active member of a family, or the person who is entitled to benefits on behalf of the family, causing a sudden removal of income
- The uncertainty and risk of surviving on the unpredictable income which is derived from criminal activity, such as theft, selling drugs or working in the sex industry.

By supporting communities to improve their surroundings either by the intervention of programmes such as Neighbourhood Management, or by encouraging the formation of community led initiatives Local Action Teams, the stigma of living and working in areas of deprivation can be addressed.



Case Study: Neighbourhood Management

Neighbourhood Management is a national regeneration programme, designed to target resources at those neighbourhoods where residents are experiencing significant disadvantages simply because of where they live, and to improve their quality of life – and thus their aspirations.

In North Somerset the Neighbourhood Management Team is working to bring these changes about in the South, Central and West Wards of Weston-super-Mare.

Achievements so far include:

- tackling problems associated with rubbish, fly-tipping, recycling and anti-social behaviour
- developing a Community Warden Scheme
- revamping local shopping areas
- supporting the development of local residents groups to give a voice to local people
- increasing opportunities for young people to experience positive activities through a neighbourhood-based youth project
- setting up a local skills and jobs shop to support people back into work and training
- developing a multi-agency problem solving approach to local crime and crime issues
- developing a time bank to encourage and reward local volunteering.

In addition, a key preventative way to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour is to encourage young people to access positive activities in their local area. There is some local evidence that the provision of play activities may have reduced anti-social behaviour in some areas in 2010. Consequently, in tough economic times, finding innovative ways to fund, set up, market and enthuse vulnerable young people to attend such activities will be needed.

Recommendations:

21. Continue to develop multi-agency and information sharing collaboration to work to reduce criminal activity and antisocial behaviour associated with poverty.
22. Continue to develop effective ways to ensure children and young people have access to quality positive activities in their area and are informed about them.

Conclusion

In challenging times, this strategy sets the direction in which partners with limited funds can mitigate the challenges of poverty for children, young people and families, in terms of access to improved life chances – including education, training, debt-free lives and childcare. There is no 'magic bullet' given the current economic situation, but by having agreed to work together with a common acknowledgement of the issues detailed in this strategy, much can practically be achieved.

Through this work we have begun to achieve consensus on what can be done within the limits of our powers and funds. Most crucially, child poverty must not be ignored, but discussed openly. Perceptions need to continue to be challenged and awareness of the impact of poverty on children heightened. Our expectations for this group of children must continue to be raised.

The pathways described in this strategy are the beginning of this journey.



Acknowledgements

Thank you to all of the following who have helped and contributed towards North Somerset's Child Poverty Strategy.

Locally:

- Special thanks to Rowan Griffin for his invaluable work in preparing this strategy.
- The Extended Services Partnership Managers for their delivery of "Join Up Join In" in North Somerset Schools:
 - Tracey Dyer
 - Chantelle Ford
 - Angela Gosling
 - Xanne Blythe
 - Marie Davis
 - Alison Arnold
 - Pippa Gribben
 - Mandi Davies
 - Lynn Winter
 - Paula Chrisostomou
 - Greg Williams
 - Caroline Malpas
- North Somerset Youth Parliament
- Cllr Jeremy Blatchford – Executive Member for Children and Young People
- Graham Turner – Chief Executive, North Somerset Council
- John Wilkinson – Assistant Director, Strategy and Improvement, North Somerset Council
- Richard Blows, Service Leader – Strategy and Improvement, North Somerset Council
- Mike Newman – CYPS Strategic Commissioning Team Manager
- Kate Wilcox – Strategic Commissioning Officer (Family Support), North Somerset Council
- Neil Harris – Lead Adviser (Vulnerable Groups), North Somerset Council
- Simon Gregory – Economic Development Service Manager, North Somerset Council
- Claire Dyke – Manager of Homelessness and Housing Advice Service, North Somerset Council
- Jo Buchan – Liberata
- Sheila French – Locality Leader, North Somerset Council
- Andrea Sully – School Improvement, Early Years, North Somerset Council
- Steve Tanner – Assistant Director of Integrated Services, North Somerset Council
- Lucy Townsend – North Somerset Council Children's Social Care

- Anne Richards –
North Somerset Citizens Advice Bureau
- Sara-Lee Roth –
North Somerset Citizens Advice Bureau
- Clive Bodley –
Chief Executive, North Somerset Housing
- Kay Wozniak –
North Somerset District Commander,
Avon and Somerset Constabulary
- Judi Harper –
Vice-Principal, Weston College
- Adam Matthews –
Headteacher, Bournville Primary School
- Lyn Hunt –
Headteacher, Windwhistle Primary School
- Jeni Murphy –
Jobcentre Plus
- Sarah Jackson –
Economic Development Service,
North Somerset Council
- Karin Dixon –
North Somerset PCT
- Dr Mike Pimm –
North Somerset GP Consortium
- Jenny Hendy –
Manager, For all Healthy Living Centre
- Sara Brown –
Manager, South Weston Neighbourhood
Management
- Bob Snow –
Voluntary Action North Somerset
- Susan Hamilton –
North Somerset PCT
- Helen Yeo –
North Somerset PCT
- CYPs Management Information Team,
North Somerset Council
- Jo Mercer –
North Somerset Safer and Stronger
Partnership Board
- Adrian Stone –
Westonworks
- Jacqui Mills –
Bristol International Airport
- Paul Connolly –
North Somerset Council Public Transport
Planning
- Helen Burge –
Banwell School
- VINVOLVE film crew and Equality South
West

And further afield:

- Dr Tess Ridge –
Department of Policy and Social Sciences,
University of Bath
- Craig Titterton –
LGID Communities of Practice
- James Hardy –
Cornwall County Council

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