

Overview and Scrutiny Report

Child Poverty

January 2014



North Tyneside Council

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Nationally some 3.5 million children – over a quarter of all children – live below the poverty line in the UK. Data as at July 2013 shows that in North Tyneside 9754 children are living below the relative poverty line. It is widely recognised that child poverty can damage children’s experiences of childhood and harm their future chances.
- 1.2 Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of the 2012/13 work programme, prioritised child poverty as an important issue and agreed to establish a joint sub-group between Children, Education and Skills and Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Sub-committees to carry out an in-depth review. It was recognised from the outset that the sub-group would not be able to make any significant contributions to the reduction of child poverty within North Tyneside, but that the review may help to raise the importance of the issue.
- 1.3 The sub-group recognised from the outset that child poverty was a vast topic area and that, for the sub-group to keep on task, it was important to clearly identify a small number of specific issues to investigate in detail. It was agreed that it would be best to look at the topic deep and narrow rather than broad but shallow. The sub-group therefore decided to look specifically at ‘best start in life, early intervention and prevention’ and ‘barriers to employment’.
- 1.4 In relation to the ‘best start in life, early intervention and prevention’ the focus was around access to children’s centres and to check if the services provided to families are helping them improve their life chances and to find ways out of the poverty cycle. Initially the sub-group received a briefing note which provided information on the purpose of the children’s centre, the facilities they offer and how they were performing. This was followed by visit to Wallsend Children’s Centre to identify first hand the work being undertaken to support vulnerable families.
- 1.5 Following on from this the sub-group decided to visit Riverside and Cullercoats Children’s Centre to gather further information on intervention and prevention services and to experience a range of centres, in terms of size, the population they serve and the social economic make-up of the surrounding communities. At these visits, the Members were able to discuss the issue of child poverty with a wide range of professionals working on the frontline with children and their families. These conversations led to the sub-group considering in more detail the issues of access to food, availability in accessing crisis loans and the work of the community entrepreneurs.
- 1.6 As unemployment is one of biggest causes of child poverty in the UK, tackling the barriers that unemployed residents face in terms of gaining employment was identified as a positive step to reducing child poverty.
- 1.7 With regard to ‘barriers to employment’ the sub-group received a briefing from the Principal Manager, Employment and Skills on the key activities that the Council undertake to help address unemployment. Following on from this, focus groups were held with unemployed residents so that Members could

gain an understanding of their personal experiences and the barriers they face gaining employment. Meetings were then held with Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme Providers, Avanta and Ingeus, to gain an understanding of their role, the problems they encounter and to explore the issues highlighted by the focus groups in more detail. The sub-group also had site visits to Avanta and Ingeus. It was evident that some of the issues highlighted were as a result of national policy or the current economic climate and the sub-group would have little power to influence this. For this reason most of the recommendations made are practical steps which can be implemented at a local level to reduce the barriers to employment.

- 1.8 The sub-group identified a total of 26 recommendations, 14 of these recommendations requires action from the Council, 11 from Jobcentre Plus and one from the Clinical Commissioning Group. A summary of the recommendations is attached at Appendix A.

2. Reason for the study

- 2.1 Nationally some 3.5 million children – over a quarter of all children – live below the poverty line in the UK. Statistics demonstrate that in North Tyneside, 9754 children are living below the relative poverty line (July 2013).¹ It is widely recognised that child poverty can damage children’s experiences of childhood and harm their future life chances. It is also recognised that action is needed at a local, regional and national level in order to make progress towards the goal in the Child Poverty Act 2010 to end child poverty by 2020.

- 2.2 In setting the 2012/13 scrutiny work programme, Members agreed that child poverty was an important issue to look at and agreed that an in-depth investigation was necessary to try and influence this important matter. Work began on this topic in November 2012 and it was recognised that this would be a long-term study that would need to be carried forward into the 2013/14 work programme. North Tyneside’s Children and Young People Plan 2010-14 identifies that child poverty is a great challenge that faces the borough. A clear relationship exists between child poverty and poor lifelong outcomes therefore it is essential to try and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

- 2.3 The purpose of this study from the outset was to identify the steps the council and its partners are taking to reduce child poverty in North Tyneside and to highlight any changes that could be made to improve the everyday lives and aspirations of young people and their families. It was recognised from the outset that the group would not be able to make any significant contributions to the reduction of child poverty within North Tyneside, but that the review may help to raise the importance of the issue.

3. Background research

- 3.1 At the beginning of the study the group received a briefing note which set out the legislative background to child poverty and the initiatives taken to combat it, both nationally and regionally. It was acknowledged that in 2011 reports

¹ Child Poverty Action Group, local authorities and child poverty: balancing threats and opportunities, July 2013

were published that changed the emphasis from income alone to wider measures of poverty. These additional measures are focused on family resources, supporting families and children's life chances.

- 3.2 The group also spent time at the beginning and throughout the study, looking at the various plans and strategies that the Council and its partners produce which aim to help combat the causes of child poverty. The Children and Young People's Plan articulates the vision of the North Tyneside Children, Young People and Learning Partnership (the Partnership) for integrating children's services and improving outcomes for young people. The Partnership brings together the relevant partners from the public and voluntary sectors, to provide strategic direction for children and young people's services. It provides the overarching framework for statutory and voluntary agencies to coordinate the planning, commissioning and delivery of children's services.
- 3.3 The Children and Young People's Plan 2010-14 has a dual function as the Council's child poverty strategy. The Plan contains an analysis of need and identifies child poverty as a priority outcome, which will primarily be addressed by:
- Supporting parents and carers to find sustainable employment
 - Raising the incomes of parents and carers unable to work
 - Transforming the aspirations and expectations of children and young people within our most deprived communities.
- 3.4 The statutory requirement to produce a Children and Young People Plan has been removed; however, the Partnership has agreed to develop a new plan for the period 2014-18. The process to develop this plan was initiated in October 2013 and the timetable indicates that the plan will be signed off by Council in July 2014 and launched in September 2014.
- 3.5 The group discussed the importance of keeping child poverty at the heart of this strategy and ensuring that the measures in place to monitor the actions to reduce child poverty are robust and reflect an accurate account of child poverty in North Tyneside. The group recognised that the Plan would not be finalised by the completion of its work. Therefore the sub-group recommends that Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which will receive the plan as part of the Budget and Policy Framework, ensure that appropriate actions and measures to address the causes and impact of child poverty are included in the plan.
- 3.6 The sub-group was also informed of the performance monitoring arrangements for the delivery of the 2010-14 Plan. It was noted that the Children and Young People's Partnership receive an annual report which reviews progress, as well as quarterly performance updates throughout the year. Members suggested that, given the importance of the plan in enhancing children's services and improving outcomes for children, young people and families, particularly the most vulnerable, it was important for Members to be informed of the actions and measures contained in the Plan. It was suggested that, following the development of the 2014-18 Children and Young People Plan, scrutiny play a role in monitoring the delivery of the objectives identified to address the various actions. The group felt that this

could be achieved through bi-annual performance reports to the Children, Education and Skills sub-committee, to ensure that appropriate and timely action is being taken to meet the stated objectives.

- 3.7 The sub-group learnt of other key strategies and plans that contribute to tackling the causes of child poverty, particularly the Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy and Action Plan 2013-16. The plan aims to establish an infrastructure that ensures vulnerable families to receive timely and effective support. The strategy sets out the following 5 key themes:

- 1) Vulnerable families are identified and supported at the earliest opportunity
- 2) Sustainable improvements in vulnerable children's outcomes are achieved by addressing the needs of the family as a whole
- 3) Services to tackle the underlying causes of poor outcomes for children and young people are developed
- 4) Every child enters school ready to succeed
- 5) Children and young people develop outside of school

Throughout the study Members looked at the services and support available to families aimed at addressing these themes.

Recommendation 1: Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in receiving the Children and Young People's Plan 2014-18, focus on ensuring that appropriate actions and measures to address the causes and effects of child poverty are included within the Plan.

Recommendation 2: Children, Education and Skills sub-committee receive a bi-annual performance report on the delivery of the Children and Young People's Plan 2014-18.

4. Remit and method

- 4.1 As child poverty is a topic relevant to the remits of the Children, Education and Skills sub-committee and the Adult Social Care and Health and Well Being sub-committee, it was agreed that a sub-group be established comprising Members from each sub-committee. Following an invitation to all Members serving on these sub-committees, the following volunteered and were appointed to serve on the sub-group:

- Cllr Amanda Normand
- Cllr Lesley Spillard
- Cllr Pat Oliver
- Cllr Sandra Graham
- Cllr Alison Waggott-Fairley

- 4.2 Councillor Alison Waggott-Fairley joined the group at a later date to provide additional capacity to complete the work that needed to be undertaken. Councillor Sandra Graham provided additional capacity to the group when required. Councillor Lesley Spillard stepped down from the group following her appointment to the Cabinet in May 2013.

- 4.3 At its first meeting the sub-group met with the Head of Commissioning and Fair Access to discuss local authorities' duties in relation to child poverty and emerging priorities for action that had been identified in child poverty strategies. This discussion began to build a greater understanding of child poverty and the barriers that exist in preventing people from breaking the poverty cycle.
- 4.4 The sub-group looked at causes of child poverty and actions to reduce child poverty, as contained in the Children and Young People's Plan, the Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy and other regional child poverty strategies. These included raising aspirations and achievements of children and young people; access to work; financial inclusion and maximising household income; improving neighbourhoods; improving health and well-being; and best start in life, early intervention and prevention.
- 4.5 It was recognised from the outset that child poverty was a vast topic area and that, for the sub-group to keep on task, it was important to clearly identify a small number of specific issues to investigate in detail. It was agreed that it would be best to look at the topic deep and narrow rather than broad but shallow. The sub-group therefore decided to look specifically at 'barriers to employment' and 'best start in life, early intervention and prevention' (through access to the children's centres).
- 4.6 In relation to 'best start in life, early intervention and prevention', the sub-group received an initial briefing note which provided information on the purpose of the children's centres, the facilities that they offered and how they were performing. Following this briefing, Members decided to conduct an initial visit to Wallsend Children's Centre to identify first hand the work being undertaken to support vulnerable families.
- 4.7 Following the visit, the sub-group decided to hold further meetings at Riverside and Cullercoats Children's Centres to gather further information on intervention and prevention services and to experience a range of centres, in terms of size, the population they serve and the social and economic make-up of the surrounding communities. At these visits, Members were able to discuss the issue of child poverty with a wide range of professionals working on the frontline with children and their families.
- 4.8 The conversations led the sub-group to consider in more detail the issues of access to food, availability of support in accessing crisis loans and the work of community entrepreneurs.
- 4.9 In relation to 'barriers to employment', the sub-group had an initial meeting with the Principal Manager, Employment and Skills and received a briefing on the key activities that the Council undertake to help address unemployment.
- 4.10 Following on from this, focus groups were held with unemployed residents so that Members could gain an understanding of their personal experiences and the barriers they face gaining employment. The sub-group met with a number of unemployed residents from the Longbenton Employability Hub and the Meadows and also met with the Manager of the Cedarwood Centre.

- 4.11 The sub-group went on to meet with Jobcentre Plus and the two Work Programme providers who operate in North Tyneside, Avanta and Ingeus, to discuss the issues which arose from the focus groups and to gain an understanding of their role. The sub-group also visited Avanta and Ingeus to see how they operate.

Research and Findings

5. Children's centres

Background information

- 5.1 Through a briefing note informing of the purpose of the children's centres, Members learnt that the centres are aimed at children under five and their families, are free to use and allow parents/guardians/carers to access a wide range of services for their child and themselves. There are currently 12 Children's Centres in North Tyneside; 6 in the West Locality and 6 in the East Locality.
- 5.2 Everything on offer at children's centres is aimed at getting children off to the best start in life. This includes helping parents to make the most of their lives too and a programme offering various training courses is available to parents/carers. The centres work with local families to provide services that they say would be of greatest need and benefit.
The children's centres in North Tyneside aim to deliver:
- The best start in life for every child
 - Better opportunities for parents
 - Affordable, good quality childcare
 - Stronger and safer families and communities
- 5.3 In preparation for the visits to the children's centres, Members agreed some key lines of enquiry that would form the basis of the discussion. The issues raised aimed to help identify if access to the services are available to all and if they are helping people to improve their life chances and find ways out of the poverty cycle. These issues were:
- General idea of the facilities and support provided
 - How parents/carers are informed of the services available and how we know that we are targeting/reaching the people most in need of the service
 - Examples of outreach work that is done
 - What consultation is undertaken to identify activities that would be of greatest use to parents/carers
 - How the centres work with different agencies to ensure a coordinated approach so that families are not dealing with lots of different people
- 5.4 Throughout the study Members stressed the importance of quick and easy access to services, as dealing with lots of different people can be off putting.

The sub-group was therefore pleased with the introduction of the Single Door Service. This is a single dedicated service that will connect an individual into North Tyneside Council services for children and families. The service can be used for all enquiries about any aspect of children and families services and helps to access the correct services quickly.

- 5.5 During the visits Members aimed to identify any practical steps that could be taken to provide additional support and advice to families living in poverty.

Findings

Wallsend

- 5.6 During the visit to Wallsend Children's Centre the group met with the Head of the Centre, community entrepreneurs, a representative of the Working Homes Outreach Team and Early Life Support Officers. A tour of the building to look first hand at all the services on offer and feedback mechanisms in place was followed by a discussion with these various professionals, to discuss the work that the centre (and linked services) undertakes to help and support vulnerable families to improve their circumstances.
- 5.7 The group received a performance plan for 2012/13, which included a set of National Indicators that the centre was collecting data on, performance of these indicators over the previous 5 years and actions for improvement. Members challenged how the centre knew it was having a long-term impact on families, which helped them to improve their situation and opportunities. It was explained that follow-up was always done with every family worked with so that the impact of actions could be measured and recorded. Case studies of work done with families and the outcomes (both short and long term) were displayed around the centre. Members noted that this tracking of progress had been highlighted as an action following Ofsted's inspection of the centre in October 2012 and were pleased that processes had been put in place to address this.
- 5.8 The group noted that there was a lot of written material around the centre which provided information to parents in relation to services available, learning courses provided and ways to access support. Concerns were raised over how parents with literacy difficulties can access this information, as there may be barriers to people asking for help. The group was assured that staff work closely with parents and that if they identify signs of literacy difficulties, they will offer support and signpost the individual to services, i.e. a course offered by the Adult Learning Alliance. Members stressed the importance of ensuring that all literature aimed at parents is in plain English and is as user friendly as possible.
- 5.9 Wallsend Children's Centre has a small allotment in its garden which allows staff to work with children to grow produce on site. This produce can then be used by the staff and children to make meals. The group raised the importance of the promotion of healthy eating and raising awareness of cooking skills. This was linked to providing a good balanced diet for young children to help with concentration, but also to demonstrate how to cook on a tight budget. Members were encouraged by the classes currently available to parents in relation to providing skills to allow and encourage them to produce home cooked food.

- 5.10 Throughout the study, access to food was an issue that was widely discussed. Members learnt that there had been a recent increase in the number of children's centre users needing the services of foodbanks. This need is met by Early Life Support Officers referring families to the Bay Foodbank. This reflects a trend regionally and nationally, with figures from the Trussell Trust charity (founders of the UK foodbank network) suggesting an eight-fold increase in the use of food banks regionally and a 170% increase nationally (between 2011/12 and 2012/13).
- 5.11 Members discussed ways in which access to low cost food could be increased to help families managing a very tight budget. The group queried whether any excess produce could be sold to parents for a small fee. It was noted that this had happened in the past, but restructuring and moving of staff meant this practice had stopped. Members agreed that this is something that could be started again, with as much produce as possible grown in order to maximise the amount that can then be sold to parents. Members suggested that the capacity to carry out such a scheme at other centres in the borough should also be explored. The group were informed that schemes had been previously trialled in other centres to sell vegetable and fruit boxes, but that the uptake of these had not been successful. However, it was thought that the recent increase in problems families have experienced in accessing food may change the demand for this service and produce grown on site would hopefully be cheaper for parents to buy than bought in fruit and vegetable boxes. It was also suggested that the children's centres look for opportunities to support and get involved in any community based allotment programmes.

Recommendation 3: Wallsend Children's Centre look at the possibilities of selling produce grown on its on-site allotment to parents at low cost price and that the possibilities of extending this scheme to other centres in the borough be examined.

Cullercoats

- 5.12 The sub-group decided to visit Cullercoats Children's Centre to learn about the experiences of families and the services in demand in a smaller centre that has a different geographical make-up to the other centres visited. It was noted that, whilst the surrounding area of Cullercoats centre does not have the same level of financial deprivation as many of the other centres within the borough, services are important and in demand for different reasons. This was largely attributed to the vast lifestyle changes experienced by parents when having a baby and the support needed to make this transition. It was noted that the social aspect of the centre was very important for parents, providing the opportunity for individuals and families to meet others experiencing the same lifestyle changes as themselves. For some people, the smaller centre makes them feel more comfortable and confident to get involved.
- 5.13 The sub-group learnt of the adult learning courses available to parents and carers that are accessing children centres across North Tyneside. These courses are aimed at providing training in key subjects such as Maths and English, but also at instilling confidence and preparing people with skills needed to help gain employment. It was noted that, as a smaller centre, Cullercoats only has one room that can be used for groups and training can therefore not be delivered on site as there is no additional space to hold a

crèche. Residents accessing the centre would therefore need to book onto to courses at Whitley Bay or Riverside Children's Centres. The group discussed the advantages of being able to offer training courses at Cullercoats Children's Centre, in terms of encouraging people to participate who may otherwise be reluctant to access an alternative centre.

- 5.14 Cullercoats Children's Centre is linked to Monkhouse Primary school and it was noted that the centre accesses a room within the school for internal staff and advisory board meetings. The option of using this for a crèche or training facility had been initially explored but that this invoked a range of safeguarding issues. The group stressed that whilst this option could be explored further, these would have to be weighed against a careful analysis of the number of people attending courses to make sure that the current demand meets the need for additional capacity. Alternatively, if demand meant waiting lists for courses, additional sessions could be held at the larger centres and support provided to encourage people to travel to these locations.
- 5.15 Whilst visiting Cullercoats Children's Centres the group discussed the restructure proposals relating to the operation of the centres. Members were happy to learn that the centres would be moving towards more flexible opening times, which would include evening and weekend openings. The group felt that this would offer a more inclusive service to residents, especially to working families that are living in poverty that would benefit from some of the support services that are offered via the centres. It was also hoped that weekend and evening opening hours would encourage more dads to get involved in the activities provided by the centres.

Recommendation 4: Cabinet ask officers to conduct an analysis of the demand for learning courses at children's centres across the borough and provide additional courses or venues if demand outweighs current capacity.

Riverside

- 5.16 During the visit to Riverside Children's Centre, the group had a tour of all the facilities on offer, including the onsite day nursery, and met with officers working within the centre and some of the boroughs community entrepreneurs. It was acknowledged that, in the future, in light of increasing budget pressures, services previously offered on a universal basis would have to be targeted to the most vulnerable families. It was noted that child poverty is on the increase and that the benefit cap and bedroom tax would be likely to further increase this figure.
- 5.17 The group were informed that there was a rise in parents accessing the centre that required support for mental health issues and that this had increased since the recession. When touring the nursery it was noted that there was an after school club room which for the large part of the school day is unused. Members discussed ways in which this space could be utilised. It was suggested that it could be used as an informal drop in area for parents (who access the children's centre/nursery) to chat and access advice/support from various professionals on a rota basis i.e. mental health specialist, paediatrician, dietician. It was recognised that there may be some safeguarding issues to explore regarding access to the room as it would need to be accessed via the same doors to the nursery. However, Members felt

that it would be worthwhile to explore this in order to provide as much support and advice to parents as possible.

- 5.18 The group recognised that future budget restrictions on the delivery of children's centre services would mean that previously universal services would need to be targeted at those in greatest need. It was noted that those most vulnerable may not actively access and pursue what is available through children's centres and the group discussed how the authority can identify these vulnerable families to offer support. It was noted that the exchange of information and intelligence across health care professionals helped to identify families that may need some additional support. It was suggested that continued and increased outreach and work within the community would be needed to help identify these families in need of support and to ensure they have the opportunity to access important services.

Public Health

- 5.19 The group discussed at length the transition of public health back into the local authority and recognised the potential to further strengthen relationships between the two areas and possibly improve delivery in relation to healthy living services. Members were informed that senior officers from Public Health and Early Intervention and Preventative Services are working together to integrate services for families with children under 5. In relation to this, the Local Authority will become responsible for commissioning health visiting services from April 2015 as part of its public health responsibilities. In advance of this the Council is looking to align health visitors with children's services and integrate the various services that are provided for families. Members welcomed this highlighting that a more joined up approach would help identify vulnerable families in need of support at an early stage.
- 5.20 In relation to access to early intervention information, the group was informed that, until recently, the centres had received live birth data from the RVI, which allowed early engagement of families following a birth, a key point in time for early intervention and the delivery of necessary support. In order to target the families in greatest need, the importance of continuing access to this birth data was highlighted. It was noted that a regional group is looking at this and that live birth data for the borough could be accessed from the Child Health Information System which is held by Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust. This would allow data from several maternity units.

Community and Family Entrepreneurs

- 5.21 The sub-group met with a Community Entrepreneur and a Family Entrepreneur during the visit to Riverside Children's Centre. These posts are part of a project that began following a successful joint bid from North Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Council to the child poverty unit to be one of 10 pilots to empower communities to develop solutions to child poverty. As part of the project local parents were employed (and enrolled on university courses) to work within communities to engage families that are struggling and provide support for them to face and overcome problems.
- 5.22 In 2011 North Tyneside commissioned Tyne Gateway (who run the community entrepreneur project) to deliver the troubled families agenda. The council pass details to the community and family entrepreneurs of troubled families in the borough that may need support and the entrepreneurs approach the families

to make them aware of the services that are available to help them. This includes in relation to access to training and employment, debt management and claiming benefits. An advantage of the entrepreneurs is they have faced the same problems as many of the families that they are looking to support and therefore come across as approachable and easy to talk to. A main aim of the community entrepreneur project has been to 'de-councilise' child poverty.

- 5.23 Members of the sub-group were pleased to hear of stories where the community and family entrepreneurs had been able to reach out to families in need who had previously been put off by discussions with professionals and highlighted the important role they have in supporting hard to reach families.

Recommendation 5: Cabinet ask officers to explore the possibilities of utilising the after school room at Riverside Children's Centre to allow parents/carers to access some informal advice in relation to health and well-being issues.

Recommendation 6: Cabinet ask officers working within children's centres to prioritise outreach and integrated working with healthcare professionals to identify the most vulnerable families so that the provision available is directed to those most in need.

Recommendation 7: Cabinet ensure that officers from Public Health and Children, Young People and Learning continue to work together and prioritise the integration of health and children's services for children under 5.

Recommendation 8: Cabinet ask officers to liaise with the relevant authorities on order to obtain live birth data that will assist in the delivery of early intervention and prevention services.

Local Welfare Provision

- 5.24 The sub-group looked at other means available to offer support to vulnerable individuals and families, particularly Local Welfare Provision. Members learnt that, as part of the wider welfare reforms, the government abolished the discretionary Social Fund (from April 2013) and required local authorities to set up replacement schemes for Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants. The rationale behind localising this support was that local authorities are better placed to provide assistance, as many of the reasons for making an application are linked to wider services that councils already provide and/or commission.
- 5.25 The group was informed that Local Welfare Provision would provide practical assistance in the form of goods and services rather than cash or substitutes and that there would be no attempt to recover any form of assistance given. There are two types of award available in North Tyneside: a crisis award and a resettlement award (also known as Home Start). Members of the group highlighted instances where residents had been in touch with them in their role as a ward councillor regarding a crisis award and found that details of the process had not been distributed to all officers working in a frontline or supporting frontline role.

- 5.26 The group expressed concern at this and stressed the importance of all officers working in a frontline or supporting frontline role having access to up-to-date and accurate information in order to help residents in need. During the course of this review discussions were held with relevant officers in relation to this issue and steps were taken to ensure services that may not have been sent information on Local Welfare Provision were sufficiently briefed.
- 5.27 The sub-group also discussed the number of successful applications to the Local Welfare Provision fund and raised concerns that the criteria to qualify for any assistance under the scheme was too strict. Members were pleased to learn that during the course of the study the criteria had been changed and that some restrictions which would limit an applicant's success had been lifted. The group felt it was important for officers to regularly monitor the number of successful applicants and the criteria to ensure that as much assistance as possible is available to vulnerable families living in poverty.

Recommendation 9: Cabinet ask officers in Adult Social Care to ensure that all frontline services are aware of the Local Welfare Provision scheme, where to signpost individuals for assistance and that regular updates are provided where necessary.

Recommendation 10: Cabinet ask officers to regularly review the number of successful applications made to the Local Welfare Provision fund and the criteria used to assess applicants.

Research and Findings

6. Barriers to Employment

Background information

- 6.1 Unemployment is one of the biggest causes of child poverty in the UK. Therefore tackling the barriers that unemployed residents face in terms of gaining employment was identified as positive step to reducing child poverty.
- 6.2 As at June 2013 the unemployment rate in North Tyneside was 8%, this was higher than the national average of 7.8% but slightly lower than the North East rate which was 10%. As at February 2013 North Tyneside had 6.9% (8,950 claimants) on Employment Support Allowance and Incapacity Benefit, again this was slightly higher than the national average of 6.2% but lower than the North East rate of 7.9%.
- 6.3 Focus groups were held with unemployed residents from the Longbenton Employability Hub and the Meadows to gain an understanding of the barriers to employment. The sub-group also spoke to the manager of the Cedarwood Centre to gain his views.
- 6.4 The focus groups were well attended and a high proportion of attendees had one or more child to support. There was also a cross section of people including the long-term unemployed, people with physical and mental health problems and ex-offenders.

- 6.5 Following on from this the sub-group had meetings with Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme providers, Avanta and Ingeus, to gain an understanding of their role, the problems they encounter and to explore the issues highlighted by the focus groups in more detail. The sub-group also had on-site visits to Avanta and Ingeus to see how they operate.
- 6.6 It is the issues highlighted by the focus groups which form the basis of the recommendations made in relation to barriers to employment.

Jobcentre Plus

- 6.7 From 1 October 2011 the day-to-day operations of Jobcentre Plus and the Pension, Disability and Carers Service were brought under the leadership of a single Chief Operating Officer, as part of the restructuring of Department of Work and Pensions to make it more efficient and streamline its management. At that point Jobcentre Plus and the Pension, Disability and Carers Service ceased to have formal executive agency status, however services continued to be delivered to jobseekers, benefit claimants and pensioners under the brands of Jobcentre Plus, Pension Service, and Disability and Carers Service as before, ahead of the introduction of Universal Credit in 2013.
- 6.8 Jobcentre Plus has a joint role, to ensure people get the benefits they are entitled to and to support claimants into work as quickly as possible. The first point of contact with the local Jobcentre takes place following an online claim (or a claim made by phone if unable to claim online).
- 6.9 There are several benefits which claimants can apply for, in North Tyneside 6.9% of residents claim Employment Support Allowance/Incapacity Benefit, and a further 4.3% claim Jobseekers Allowance (May 2013). The main entitlement conditions for receipt of Jobseekers Allowance are that claimants are available for and actively seeking work. Initially claimants are required to agree a Jobseekers Agreement setting out what they are going to do to find work and any restrictions they have such as caring responsibilities. The Jobseeker's Agreement gives important information about the claimant's responsibilities and what they must do to be entitled to Jobseeker's Allowance/National Insurance Credits, having a Jobseeker's Agreement is a primary condition of entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance. Claimants must also sign a declaration each fortnight to say that they are available for and actively seeking employment and that their circumstances have not changed. At this fortnightly meeting the Jobcentre Plus advisor will review the steps the claimant has taken to look for work, including how many jobs they have applied for.
- 6.10 Universal Credit is currently being rolled out and will be fully in place across the whole of the United Kingdom by 2017. This will replace six existing benefits with a single monthly payment. As from the 14 October 2013 and as part of Universal Credit, people making a new claim to Jobseekers Allowance and those returning from the Work Programme will have to agree a Claimant Commitment which will take the place of the Jobseekers Agreement. This is being phased in at 100 Jobcentres per month until it is in place across the country by spring 2014. The Claimant Commitment will set out all requirements and consequences in one place, ensuring claimants understand what is required.

- 6.11 The Universal Jobmatch is a job search website launched by the Department of Works and Pension in November 2012. This is an online service which has radically changed the way in which people search and apply for jobs.
- 6.12 Jobcentre Plus refers claimants to the Work Programme, generally these are claimants who are long-term unemployed or are at most risk of becoming so. Claimants can also volunteer to go onto the Work Programme.

Work Programme

- 6.13 The Work Programme was launched in June 2011 and nationally is delivered by a range of private, public and voluntary sector organisations. In North Tyneside there are two Work Programme providers, Avanta and Ingeus, both are based in North Shields but cover the whole of North Tyneside.
- 6.14 The Work Programme provides tailored support to help clients get into work, this involves offering the right support to help them overcome the barriers they face that prevents them from gaining and sustaining employment. Claimants participate in the work programme for two years, at this stage if the client doesn't gain employment they will return to Jobcentre Plus.

Findings

- 6.15 This section contains the findings and recommendations from the issues which emerged from the focus groups and subsequent meetings with Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme providers.
- 6.16 The sub-group recognise that some of the issues highlighted were as a result of national policy or the current economic climate and that the sub-group would have little power to influence this. With this in mind most of the recommendations which have been made are practical steps which can be implemented at a local level to help reduce the barriers to employment.
- 6.17 Please note that through this section two terms are used to describe service users; 'claimants' which is used by Jobcentre Plus and 'clients' which is used by the Work Programme providers.

Customer care:

- 6.18 During the focus groups the sub-group heard some negative feedback relating to the customer service in the local Jobcentres. This included the poor attitude advisors had towards claimants, the limited support given to claimants looking for employment and the intimidating environment created through the use of security guards.
- 6.19 Although it was recognised in the focus groups that some Jobcentre Plus advisors were helpful and were working under pressure, in general, Jobcentre Plus was portrayed as being process driven and concentrating on claimant's benefits and sanctions rather than offering the support needed to claimants so they could find employment. There was a general feeling that these issues could put people off claiming benefits.

- 6.20 There was a particular issue raised about the use of uniformed security guards on the doors at local jobcentres and that this was intimidating. Their role was also questioned and it was suggested that they often greet claimants and ask them for personal information. One unemployed resident said, 'even the security guards on the doors ask for your personal details, which makes you feel that everyone knows your business'. Another said that 'having security guards on the doors make you feel that you're not trusted'.
- 6.21 In response to the points raised in the focus groups, Jobcentre Plus stressed that customer care and staff performance was very important to them and that they had customer service standards to adhere to, as well as a Customer Charter which outlines what a claimant can expect from Jobcentre Plus.
- 6.22 Jobcentre Plus also informed the sub-group that the security guard's correct job title is Customer Service Officer and that they are not employed by Jobcentre Plus but by G4S who have the national security contract.
- 6.23 The sub-group is pleased to note that since their meeting, Jobcentre Plus has taken on board some of the issues raised and has looked at how customer service could be improved, with the following actions being introduced or reinforced:-
- Held honest conversations with all managers in North Tyneside about what good customer service looks like and how they know if they are delivering it.
 - All staff have a Key Work Objective for customer service which is tested by observation, Quality Assurance Framework checks, etc. and reviewed monthly via 1-2-1's (as part of Jobcentre Plus performance management system)
 - Undertaken random checks on 1-2-1s to ensure they are taking place and that they include discussion about customer service. Also directly observing staff to gain personal insight into customer service standards
 - Complaints are taken seriously and appropriate action taken when standards are not acceptable.
 - When vulnerable claimants are identified, Jobcentre Plus has specialist advisors to support them for example Disability Employment Advisors and Drug and Alcohol Advisors. As part of a Social Justice pilot, a new Coach role has recently been introduced. These members of staff will support customers who have multiple disadvantages, will also help to build knowledge of what works, and help to build the capacity of colleagues to support vulnerable customers
 - Advisor Managers have reminded Customer Service Officers (Security Guards) of their responsibilities, so they do not overstep the mark in terms of questioning claimants at the front desk.
- 6.24 The sub-group remain concerned about issues raised during the focus groups that suggested that some advisors were disrespectful to claimants. In addition, Members were concerned that the Jobseekers Agreement which outlines what is expected from the claimant and what they must do to claim Jobseekers Allowance could be considered to be one-sided and give the impression that claimants don't have any rights.

- 6.25 The sub-group was of the view that the Customer Charter should be incorporated into or appended to the Jobseekers Agreement or the Claimant Commitment (once it is in place). This would make claimants aware of what they can expect from Jobcentre Plus and help to break down the 'us and them' culture which has been highlighted.

Recommendation 11: Jobcentre Plus incorporates or appends the Customer Charter to the Jobseekers Agreement or the Claimant Commitment (once it is in place).

Recommendation 12: Jobcentre Plus take account of the negative comments received from unemployed residents in relation to the service received, in particular about the attitude of some advisors and the intimidating environment which is created.

Recommendation 13: Jobcentre Plus hold regular reviews with advisors to ensure that they are meeting customer service standards and that this includes contracted staff such as Customer Services Officers employed by G4S.

Recommendation 14: The local Jobcentre raise claimants concerns at a national level regarding the intimidating environment created through Customer Services Officers wearing security style uniforms.

Sanctions and alternative support:

- 6.26 Both the Work Programme providers and focus group members believed that sanctioning in the form of loss of benefits was increasing. This is evidenced in a recent Citizens Advice report (6 November 2013) which states that Department of Work and Pensions own figures show that from July 2012 to June 2013, there was a 24% increase in the number of sanctions since the same period a year earlier. Citizen's Advice has also reported a 64% increase in problems related to Jobseekers Allowance sanctions since the same time last year.
- 6.27 Jobcentre Plus informed the sub-group that claimants are required to meet the basic labour market conditions which include being available for work, actively seeking work and having a signed up-to-date Jobseeker's Agreement/Claimant Commitment. Active job search, engagement with advisers and participation in some employment support programmes are mandatory requirements for claimants, because there is evidence that compliance with these requirements is more likely to lead to people getting a job more quickly. Failure to meet any of these requirements could lead to disentitlement or a sanction. A sanction is a complete withdrawal of the claimant's JSA award for specified periods.
- 6.28 A Jobcentre Plus decision maker can disallow and/or sanction benefits if a claimant has failed to fulfil any of the Jobseeker Allowance entitlement conditions, for example is not available for or actively seeking work, or if a claimant fails to fulfil all of their responsibilities as a claimant e.g. fails to attend an interview without good reason, failing to take part in the Work Programme

or leaving a job without a good enough reason. They cannot give sanctions if the claimant can provide a good reason for their behaviour. If a claimant thinks that they have been given a sanction unfairly they can challenge this decision through a reconsideration and appeals process.

- 6.29 Sanctions are made at lower, intermediate and higher levels and could last anywhere between 4 weeks to 156 weeks depending on the reason for the sanction. From October 2014, as part of Universal Credit, new rules will mean that sanctioning will become stricter, with first sanctions increasing from 4 weeks to 12 weeks.
- 6.30 The sub-group were pleased to hear that the Department of Work and Pensions has appointed Matthew Oakley, a member of the Social Security Advisory Committee, to carry out an independent review of Jobseekers Allowance sanctions. The review will look at:
- the clarity of information given to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants who have had their benefits reduced for failing to take part in mandatory back to work schemes
 - what could be done to make the process clearer
- 6.31 Although Jobcentre Plus clarified that claimants are issued with a letter when the sanction/disallowance is applied and also on referral to mandatory programmes, which details their responsibilities and the impact on their benefit should they fail to comply (the Claimant Commitment will strengthen this message further). The sub-group were concerned to hear during focus group discussions, that people often didn't understand why they had received a sanction and as a consequence were at risk of doing the same thing again and receiving another more severe sanction
- 6.32 At the point of a claimant receiving a sanction the sub-group would like Jobcentre Plus to make it clear to the claimant why they have received a sanction and what the consequences would be if they did the same again. They also wanted claimants to be made aware of the appeals process so they could challenge the decision if they felt it was unfair. The sub-group stressed that any information should be clearly written and in plain English, and that consideration is given about how to clearly provide information to claimants for who English is a second language.
- 6.33 The sub-group concluded that if claimants were made aware at the outset that their benefits would be sanctioned for certain misconducts, that this would avoid many claimants receiving sanctions in the first place.

Recommendation 15: Jobcentre Plus ensures that claimants who receive sanctions understand the reason why this has happened and that they are made aware of the appeals process.

Recommendation 16: Jobcentre Plus ensures at the outset that new claimants are aware of the sanctioning process and the reasons why their benefit will be sanctioned.

6.34 The sub-group were informed that for claimants who received a sanction there was alternative support including:

- Hardship Payment – these are reduced-rate payments of ‘income-based’ Jobseekers Allowance that are made in certain circumstances by Jobcentre Plus. Hardship payments are based on the claimants needs and are usually their income-based Jobseekers Allowance reduced by 20% or 40%. This is administered by Jobcentre Plus.
- Budgeting Loan – is an interest-free loan for people who have been on Income Support, income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance (income-related), Pension Credit or payment on account of one of these benefits, for at least 26 weeks. It is intended to help spread the cost of certain one-off expenses over a longer period. The amount you get is decided by the decision maker at Jobcentre Plus.
- Local Welfare Provision – there is more detail about this in paragraph 5.25. The fund provides practical assistance in the form of goods and services rather than cash or substitutes and is administered by the Council.
- Foodbanks – for people in financial crisis, they can receive food parcels from the Bay Foodbank based in North Tyneside

6.35 Jobcentre Plus clarified that their advisors have access to information about local support available, including Local Welfare Provision and foodbanks via an Advisor information portal, and that they use this to sign post claimants where appropriate. However the sub-group were concerned that there was a general feeling in the focus groups that when a claimant was given a sanction advisors didn’t appear to know what alternative support was available or where to sign post claimants. A young mum with four young children informed the sub-group that her husband had been sanctioned and he hadn’t received any advice from the Jobcentre Plus advisor regarding alternative support for his family

6.36 The sub-group stressed the importance of Jobcentre Plus advisors being up to date regarding the alternative support available, and that they sign post claimants who have been sanctioned to access this support. It was suggested that to facilitate this, an information pack outlining the alternative support available and how it can be accessed was produced which could be used by advisors and also provided to claimants who have been sanctioned. Members also suggested that posters were displayed in Jobcentre Plus offices which gave the Gateway number to contact for the Local Welfare Provision fund.

Recommendation 17: Jobcentre Plus ensures that all advisors are up to date regarding the alternative support available.

Recommendation 18: Jobcentre Plus produces an information pack outlining the alternative support available and makes this available to claimants who have been sanctioned.

6.37 In relation to the Local Welfare Provision, the sub-group were pleased to hear that the Council had revised the criteria for accessing the fund which originally excluded claimants who had been sanctioned and who are now considered on a case by case basis.

- 6.38 The sub-group were informed that the Council take referrals for the fund via the telephone. Using the Gateway number customers contact the welfare assistance officer who is based in Adult Social Care. At this stage detailed screening and a risk assessment is undertaken before the officer decides what level of assistance the customer will receive. The Gateway number has been widely publicised and has been provided to Jobcentre Plus and partner agencies so that that people can be sign-posted to apply for the fund. It was also noted that there is a dispute resolution process to follow if the customer didn't agree with the decision made.
- 6.39 The Work Programme providers mentioned that they have clients who telephone the Council to apply for Local Welfare Provision and are often refused because they haven't been able to explain their personal circumstances fully. They said that it would be beneficial and less stressful for their clients if the Work Programme providers and other external agencies were allowed to speak on behalf of their clients so that full details supporting their application can be provided.
- 6.40 The sub-group were informed that there is currently no agreement in place to allow external agencies speak on their clients, however the Council recognises that in certain circumstances this will be necessary and special arrangements would be put in place for certain groups, such as people with a learning disability. It was noted that an arrangement has also been put in place with Meadowell Connected to allow them to speak on behalf of their clients at the dispute resolution stage.
- 6.41 The sub-group recommended that the Head of Adult Social Care explores the possibility of allowing external agencies to speak on behalf of their client when applying to the Local Welfare Provision. They concluded that this would be both beneficial and less stressful for some clients and potentially reduce the number of clients going through the dispute resolution process.

Recommendation 19: Head of Adult Social Care explores the possibility of allowing external agencies to speak on behalf of their client when applying to the Local Welfare Provision.

Access to IT and IT support:

- 6.42 The Universal Jobmatch is a job search website launched by the Department of Work and Pensions in November 2012. This is an online service which has radically changed the way in which people search and apply for jobs.
- 6.43 According to a document released by the Department of Work and Pensions, Universal Credit: Local Support Services Framework a survey of existing claimants showed that 78% use the internet, however only 14% had made a new claim on line. This still leaves a high proportion of claimants who are not digitally ready, don't have access to computers at home and who will need IT support.
- 6.44 It was evident in the focus groups that this new way of applying for jobs has created a lot of anxiety and concerns and these will be further exacerbated

with the introduction of Universal Credit and the new Claimant Commitment, when claimants will need to register for benefits and manage their account on line, along with the expectation that will spend 35 hours per week undertaking job searching activities.

- 6.45 The sub-group heard that there were major technical problems with the Jobmatch website and its reliability. In the focus groups a number of concerns were raised about the system regularly crashing, jobs not being kept up to date and the loss of claimant's accounts including their job searches, for example an unemployed resident mentioned that he had lost his account and job search history. This was a particular concern, as Jobcentre Plus advisors use the site to access claimant's accounts to check their job search history and as evidence to apply sanctions if they haven't applied for enough jobs.
- 6.46 When the sub-group raised this with Jobcentre Plus, they said they were aware of the problems with the site and although it is better than it was the problems are not totally solved. They did give assurance that the Jobcentre Plus advisors don't rely solely on the website for evidence and they will accept other forms of evidence.
- 6.47 In relation to the Universal Jobmatch website, the introduction of Universal Credit and the new Claimant Commitment it is crucial that unemployed residents are digitally ready. The sub-group were pleased to hear that an IT mapping exercise is currently being carried out as part of the local Welfare Reform Task Group work, however as part of the review wanted to seek assurance that computers were readily available, accessible and that IT support was in place for those who needed it.
- 6.48 Jobcentre Plus notified the sub-group that they have four computers, one in each of the local jobcentres for claimants to access the internet and email. There is a programme due to commence early next year to increase this number (numbers are yet to be confirmed). The claimant can book a time slot with their local Jobcentre Plus office and there isn't a time limit for usage, however if there was high demand on a particular day, it would be managed by restricting the length of time individual were allocated. When a skills need is identified claimants are mandated to the Skills Funding Agency provision and signposted to other sources of help as appropriate, for example work clubs, local venues with IT access etc. Jobcentre Plus managers are currently working with the Skills Funding Agency on an on-going basis to help them understand the IT needs of Jobcentre Plus claimants to ensure that they have access to provision that is appropriate and addresses those needs. Claimants with IT needs are identified as part of the advisory diagnostic interview when agreeing the Jobseekers Agreement and on an on-going basis when reviewing the claimant's job search activity (every 2 weeks).
- 6.49 Ingeus and Avanta the Work Programme providers both have a large bank of computers which are available by appointment solely for their clients. They also have staff on hand to support clients who have limited IT skills and also offer course to clients in IT.

- 6.50 Third sector organisations such as the Longbenton Employability Hub, The Meadows and the Cedarwood Centre also have computers and IT support available for local residents.
- 6.51 The sub-group learnt that the Council via the Adult Learning Alliance are providing an increasing number of employability type courses for people who are referred from JCP, this includes IT training. It is early days to assess the impact of this training but progress and achievement will be monitored.
- 6.52 Some unemployed residents mentioned that they used the computers provided by the library service and although they found the staff helpful their IT knowledge was limited. Also only being allowed 30 minutes free access per day wasn't enough time to carry out job searches and complete on line application forms. There was also concern about using computers in public spaces to upload personal details when completing application forms etc.
- 6.53 Subsequently the library service informed the sub-group that all residents get 3 hours per week free time that can be used for unlimited access to any type of site. This used to be limited to 30 minutes per day but has recently changed to allow the 3 hours to be used all at once if required. In addition residents can request a 'free information session', which isn't time limited and gives free access to MS office and a range of official internet sites such as .gov.uk etc. If there is a site someone thinks should be free but isn't such as a job seeking site the library service would consider this and make it free if appropriate. The 3 hours of free time does include access to email however it is not included in the 'free information session' as it would give access to other leisure sites, for example accessing yahoo email would give access to all of the yahoo services. Access to email outside of the free time is charged at £1.00 per hour. One option available to residents to get unlimited internet and email access at libraries is to purchase a premier card, this is currently priced at £30.00 per year or £24.00 for concessions, the pricing structure however is currently being reviewed due to take up being low. To help residents on benefits or low incomes the library service explored the possibility of residents paying for the premier card on a monthly basis, however this was going to be too costly for the Council to administer.
- 6.54 Across North Tyneside library service there are a total of 191 computers available for public use. Although the library service can help customers log onto the PCs and with basic queries and troubleshooting, staff aren't able to offer ICT support as staff aren't trained to do this and they wouldn't have the time to deal with long queries. They do however constantly get asked for ICT support and at one stage used digital champions at some sites when the Adult Learning Alliance ran the project but this has now ended.
- 6.55 The sub-group concluded that there didn't appear to be an issue in relation to unemployed residents gaining access to computers in local libraries, however were concerned at the level of IT support available and the limited access to email on the library service computers.
- 6.56 In relation to the library service, the sub-group recommend that the Head of Environment and Leisure Services explores the possibility of gaining external funding or partnership working to provide IT support across the library service

and also to explore how unemployed residents can have more access to email.

- 6.57 In light of the introduction of Universal Credit and the requirement that claimants complete on-line forms to claim benefits, the sub-group were concerned to hear that there is only one computer currently available in each of local jobcentre offices. The sub-group noted the programme due to commence early next year to increase this number, but recommended that Jobcentre Plus ensure that this is at an adequate level to meet demand and that suitably qualified support is on hand to help claimants complete the forms.

Recommendation 20: Jobcentre Plus as part of their programme to increase computers in local jobcentre offices ensures that this is at an adequate level to meet demand and that suitably qualified support is on hand to help claimants complete forms.

Recommendation 21: Jobcentre Plus ensures that all claimants who are not digitally ready are identified and given information on where they can access computers and IT support / training.

Recommendation 22: Head of Environment and Leisure Services explores the possibility of gaining external funding or partnership working in order to provide IT support across the library service.

Recommendation 23: Head of Environment and Leisure Services explores how unemployed residents can have more access to email on library service computers.

Work Programme:

- 6.58 During meetings and site visits with the Work Programme providers a number of issues arose. These are outlined in the section below.
- 6.59 When Jobcentre Plus refers a client to the Work Programme provider they often get limited details about the client. It would be beneficial to the Work Programme provider and the client if more information was provided such as any health or mental health issues they have, what their barriers to employment are, their work history etc. They also need to keep them up to date with client's change of circumstances. If these details were provided, clients wouldn't be repeatedly asked for the same information also issues would be identified before the client started with the Work Programme so the right support can be in place from the outset.

Recommendation 24: Jobcentre Plus ensures that Work Programme providers receive all the necessary details relating to a client prior to them commencing the programme and that they keep the Work Programme providers up to date with a client's change of circumstances.

- 6.60 A large proportion of clients who attend the Work Programme have either a health or a mental health issue which makes finding sustained employment for clients in these groups a huge challenge. The Work Programme are also

seeing an increase in clients, who following a work capability assessment, have been taken off the old Incapacity Benefit and have been assessed as fit for work. Many of these clients have never worked, haven't got the ability to work or will need a lot of support to gain employment. Ingeus mentioned that they have a Health and Wellbeing service which works with clients to get them fit for work. Although the work programme providers report many success stories of clients with health issues gaining sustained employment there are also many whose problems are so severe they fear they may never gain employment. It is reported that this creates a lot of stress and anxiety for clients who are made to attend work programmes. Currently once a client starts on a Work Programme they are there for two years and can't be referred back to Jobcentre Plus, however often it is evident from early on that someone is not suitable for the Work Programme and will never gain sustained employment. In these circumstances it would be beneficial if the Work Programme provider could use their discretion and be allowed to refer them back to Jobcentre Plus.

Recommendation 25: The Elected Mayor writes to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to highlight the issues which arose in relation to the suitability of the Work Programme in meeting the needs of clients with more severe health issues.

- 6.61 The sub-group were informed about a man who had been referred to the Work Programme he had previously received 16 sanctions from Jobcentre Plus. It was recognised fairly early on by the Work Programme via their Mental Health Advisor that this client had mental health problems. The advisor attempted to refer him to the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service for assessment but was told that referrals could only be made through a GP. This can be a lengthy process and relies on the client dealing with it themselves. In some areas IAPT services take self-referrals or referrals from others such as Work Programme providers, this is beneficial for the client as it is a speedier process. The Clinical Commissioning Group is currently procuring a new IAPT service 'Talking Therapies' which will be in place by April 2014. The sub-group have asked North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group to give consideration to the new contract allowing self-referral or referrals from others, such as external agencies.

Recommendation 26: North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group considers as part of the new Talking Therapies contract to allow self-referrals or referrals from others, such as external agencies.

7.0 Background Information

Report to Cabinet July 2011 – Tyne Gateway
Briefing note – Child Poverty provided by Schools, Learning and Skills
Briefing note – North Tyneside Council's response to tackling unemployment provided by Employment and Skills
ONS Population Survey
Jobseeker's Allowance – Help while you look for work
About Jobcentre Plus – Our service standards
Our Customer Charter – Department for Work and Pensions
Gov.UK – website

Notes of focus group meetings with Longbenton Employability Hub, the Meadows and the Cedarwood Centre
Notes of meetings with Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme Providers
Ofsted Inspection reports for North Tyneside Children's Centres
Briefing note – Background information on children's centres
Report to Economic Prosperity and Housing Sub-committee, 22nd July 2013, Local Welfare Provision and Housing Gateway
Notes of visits to children's centres
Children and Young People's Plan 2010-14
Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy and Action Plan 2013-16

8.0 Acknowledgements

- 8.1 The sub-group would like to place on record their thanks to the following officers for the information, support and advice they have provided:

Sandra Brydon - Senior External Relations Manager, Jobcentre Plus
Kaye Rideout – Regional Director North East, Avanta
John Pattison - Business Manager (North Tyneside), Avanta
Allyson Donohoe – Operations Manager, Ingeus
James Neilands – Regional Skills Manager North East, Ingeus
Tracey Rutherford – Ingeus
The Longbenton Employability Hub
The Meadows
The Cedarwood Centre
Mark Longstaff, Head of Commissioning and Fair Access, NTC
Shona Duncan, Principal Manager - Employment and Skills, NTC
Mark Barrett, Senior Manager - Education to Employment, NTC
Fiona Walker – Children's Centre Team Lead, NTC
Kate Williams – Children's Centre Team Lead, NTC
Community and Family Entrepreneurs
Wendy Hook – Early Life Programme Leader, NTC
Nicki Garner – Childcare Manager, NTC
Emma Fagan – Scrutiny Advisor, NTC
Sharon Ranadé – Scrutiny Advisor, NTC

9.0 Appendices

Appendix A – Summary of recommendations

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1: Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in receiving the Children and Young People's Plan 2014-18, focus on ensuring that appropriate actions and measures to address the causes and effects of child poverty are included within the Plan.

Recommendation 2: Children, Education and Skills sub-committee receive a bi-annual performance report on the delivery of the Children and Young People's Plan 2014-18.

Recommendation 3: Wallsend Children's Centre look at the possibilities of selling produce grown on its on-site allotment to parents at low cost price and that the possibilities of extending this scheme to other centres in the borough be examined.

Recommendation 4: Cabinet ask officers to conduct an analysis of the demand for learning courses at children's centres across the borough and provide additional courses or venues if demand outweighs current capacity.

Recommendation 5: Cabinet ask officers to explore the possibilities of utilising the after school room at Riverside Children's Centre to allow parents/carers to access some informal advice in relation to health and well-being issues.

Recommendation 6: Cabinet ask officers working within children's centres to prioritise outreach and integrated working with healthcare professionals to identify the most vulnerable families so that the provision available is directed to those most in need.

Recommendation 7: Cabinet ensure that officers from Public Health and Children, Young People and Learning continue to work together and prioritise the integration of health and children's services for children under 5.

Recommendation 8: Cabinet ask officers to liaise with the relevant authorities in order to obtain live birth data that will assist in the delivery of early intervention and prevention services.

Recommendation 9: Cabinet ask officers in Adult Social Care to ensure that all frontline services are aware of the Local Welfare Provision scheme, where to signpost individuals for assistance and that regular updates are provided where necessary.

Recommendation 10: Cabinet ask officers to regularly review the number of successful applications made to the Local Welfare Provision fund and the criteria used to assess applicants.

Recommendation 11: Jobcentre Plus incorporates / appends the Customer Charter to the Jobseekers Agreement or the Claimant Commitment (once it is in place).

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about the attitude of some advisors and the intimidating environment which is created.

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Recommendation 23: Head of Environment and Leisure Services explores how unemployed residents can have more access to email on library service computers.

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Recommendation 26: North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group considers as part of the new Talking Therapies contract to allow self-referrals or referrals from others, such as external agencies.