



Bedfordshire Child Poverty Network

Launch Event

Friday 7th November 2008
The Rufus Centre, Flitwick

Summary Report

Introduction

Over 80 people attended the event to launch Bedfordshire's new child poverty network on 7th November.

The event was opened by the Chair, **Janet Ridge** (Chief Executive - Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity), who explained that an indicator on tackling child poverty (NI 116) had now been included in Bedfordshire's new Local Area Agreement. This indicator was being overseen, on behalf of the Countywide Partnership, by the Building Cohesive and Strong Communities Thematic Partnership, which she chairs. Janet stressed the importance of a wide range of agencies, from the statutory and voluntary sectors, taking this work forward.

Presentations

Len Simkins (Facilitator - Bedfordshire Tackling Poverty Together Group) gave a background to the event. He explained that 30% of children in the UK live in poverty and that in some wards in Bedford the figure is higher than 30%. There had been pressure for a number of years to get child poverty issues on the local agenda but the adoption of NI 116 in the Local Area Agreement now meant that child poverty was really "on the map" in Bedfordshire. Len explained that purpose of the event was: to learn more about child poverty in the UK and in Bedfordshire; to plan how we can tackle child poverty in Bedfordshire; and to take action by launching a child poverty network and by beginning to develop a child poverty strategy.



The guest speaker at the event was **Hilary Fisher** (Director – End Child Poverty). In her presentation Hilary gave details of:

Child poverty in the UK - 3.9 million children live in poverty in the UK. Hilary talked about the detrimental effects that this has on education, housing, health and life expectancy.

Child poverty in Bedfordshire - in some wards over 30% of children live in workless families and over 50% live in low income families.

End Child Poverty campaign - a coalition of over 140 organisations concerned about child poverty in the UK.

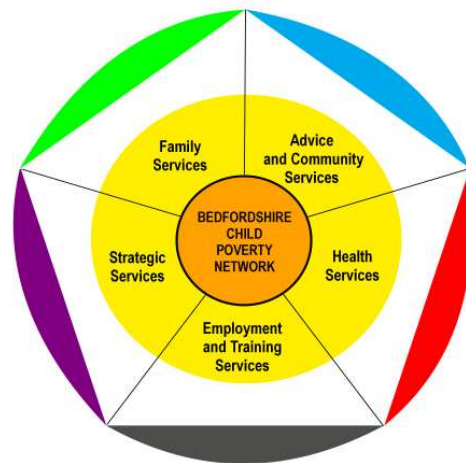
Further details of Hilary's presentation can be found in the full report on the event.



Katie Theodore (Head of Commissioning - Early Intervention and Prevention, Children's Services, Beds County Council) stressed the importance of collaborative action to tackle child poverty. It was essential for key local organisations to show a commitment to tackle child poverty by: taking responsibility for change; being accountable for action; and making a difference for children.

Katie went on to look at the role of the new child poverty network. She explained that the discussions in the workshops at the event would help: shape the direction of the network; share thinking about child poverty; influence strategy; and inform service design.






The first meeting of the new child poverty network will be held in December 2008 and a strategy to tackle child poverty in Bedfordshire will be produced in early 2009.



Workshops

Attendees at the event then split into 5 themed groups to discuss the development of a child poverty network and a strategy to tackle child poverty in Bedfordshire

Workshops were held for people working in:

-  Family services
-  Advice and community services
-  Health services
-  Employment and training services
-  Strategic services

Each workshop group discussed the following questions:

1. Why is child poverty your organisation's business?
2. What can your organisation (or sector) do differently to start to alleviate child poverty in Bedfordshire?
3. What do you want to see from the new child poverty network in Bedfordshire?

The individual comments made in each workshop were recorded on post-it notes and flip charts which were displayed in the main hall for all participants to see. The workshop facilitators then gave feedback on the key comments from their group to the plenary session. A record of all the comments and feedback will be included in the full report on the event.

Conclusion

Janet Ridge closed the event with the key messages that had been made during the morning.

- The event had made people aware of the **scope of the problem** and the **size of the challenge** facing us in Bedfordshire.
- Child poverty is not just about children - it is about **families**. A key role for the new network will be to raise awareness of how we help families to lift themselves out of poverty.
- Child poverty is **everybody's business** and the launch of the Bedfordshire Child Poverty Network is an excellent opportunity for partnership working - across both the statutory and voluntary sectors and between children's and adult services.
- This is the beginning of the process. With the commitment shown at the launch event, the organisations joining together to form the Network can **make a real difference** in lifting children in Bedfordshire out of poverty.

The full report on the event will be available at the end of November on the TPT Group website: www.tacklingpoverty-beds.org.uk