



SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 16 NOVEMBER 2016

**THE BISHOP'S POVERTY COMMISSION REPORT - COUNTY COUNCIL WORK
TO PROGRESS RECOMMENDATIONS**

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Purpose of Report

1. To inform the Scrutiny Commission of progress made by the County Council and its partners against those recommendations of the Bishop's Poverty Commission that relate to the County Council's area of business and links with the Signposting and Community Support Service.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. At the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission on 16th April 2016 members considered the Signposting and Community Support Service. The Commission recommended the continuation of this Service and also expressed an interest in learning more about the Council's involvement in taking forward the Bishop's Poverty Commission report including how this might align with the Signposting and Community Support Service.

The Bishop's Poverty Commission

3. The Bishop's Poverty Commission involved a partnership between the Diocese of Leicester, local universities and local authorities which came together to look at Poverty in Leicester and Leicestershire. In February 2015, the Commission issued a report on Poverty, Debt and Hunger – "How do you get by? Voices of Leicester and Leicestershire". The report gives an assessment of the nature of poverty based on discussions with people affected as well as professionals and is based on an understanding of poverty articulated by the Church Urban Fund that encompasses:
 - Poverty of resources – where people lack sufficient resources, (income, skills, qualifications, health etc.) to achieve a good standard of living.
 - Poverty of relationships – where people lack the strong and supportive relationships on which individual, family and community life are built, resulting in loneliness and isolation.
 - Poverty of identity – where people lack a strong sense of self-worth and a belief in their own ability to respond to challenges.

4. The study identifies that financial hardship is at the core of poverty and that the facets of poverty include unhappiness and not coping and isolation and loneliness. It is also identified that it may not be helpful to view those in poverty as a distinct group within the population as increasing economic insecurity causes frequent movement in and out of poverty. The report highlights some of the roles for the Church in responding to poverty including acting as a broker to lever change and as a catalyst to “make things happen” and notes that joint working is critical to achieving significant change.
5. The recommendations of the report were as follows:
 - The Church embraces its ability to make a difference and promotes capacity building to support local activity and understanding of local needs and assets.
 - The further development of churches to provide inclusive drop-in space, particularly for vulnerable people, to enable community connections and mutual support.
 - Churches to investigate how local support can be organised, including use of buildings. A key element of this recommendation is that the Diocese should broker dialogue across stakeholders to develop joint strategies concerning financial inclusion and fair finance, collate shared expertise and co-ordinate support for new initiatives.
 - Churches broker the promotion of different creative enterprises and practical ideas to address poverty.
 - Churches work to provide community based signposting support and advocacy.
6. Whilst the above recommendations focus on the role of the Church the County Council is carrying out complementary and supportive work as follows:

Capacity building:

- Funding the development of Good Neighbour Schemes (where volunteers coordinate networks of mutual support) facilitated by the Rural Community Council.
- Commissioning Voluntary Action Leicestershire to provide community capacity building support for communities to develop new initiatives that bring people together and develop resilience and resourcefulness particularly in areas of economic disadvantage.
- Providing Local Area Co-ordination in identified priority areas where Co-ordinators build community capacity, by helping people to develop networks of local support, with other residents and through accessing relevant community resources.

Inclusive space supporting vulnerable people:

- The Rural Community Council is commissioned to support the development of community buildings for inclusive service provision particularly focused on vulnerable people. The Council also supports the development of new initiatives focused on vulnerable people through the SHIRE Community Grants programme (which provides grant funding for eligible projects). In addition the Countywide Infrastructure Organisation contract delivered by VAL enables VCS organisations to obtain support to develop and deliver projects that focus on supporting vulnerable people. Keep Safe Places across the County provide somewhere for people to go if they feel upset, scared, or need help and reassurance.

Poverty in relationships:

- Being a parent carries a poverty risk and households with children are more likely to be poor than those without. This is the result of both greater outgoings to support children and a reduced capacity to participate in the labour market due to increased childcare responsibilities.
- Relationship breakdown can be both a cause and an effect of poverty and hardship. The stress of poverty can have a negative effect on relationship quality and stability and cause greater risk of relationship breakdown. In turn, relationship breakdown can increase the risk of poverty for both children and adults but it is resident mothers and children who are at greater risk of falling into persistent poverty.
- Domestic abuse is a significant factor in the lives of over a third of children Leicestershire County Council services work with, and is therefore a core element of our business. The Council supports the development of corporate and multi-agency initiatives which in turn help deliver priorities agreed by the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Domestic Abuse Delivery Group. This work supports continued development of the multi-agency response to domestic abuse.
- A core element of the Council's work in this area is to fund commissioning of specialist services for victims and families of domestic abuse as well as working pragmatically to identify and respond to gaps, risks and opportunities. In addition Early Help Services within Leicestershire County Council (which include Supporting Leicestershire Families and Children's Centres) work with families who may be facing multiple challenges and vulnerabilities. A key focus of support is tackling social and financial isolation; working to build positive family relationships; and promoting resilience and self-help skills within families, neighbourhoods and communities. Joint work with the Department of Work and Pensions through these services supports families to move away from dependence on benefits and closer to employment.

Creative approaches to tackling poverty:

- The County Council's SHIRE Community Grants programme is designed to encourage and support new and creative approaches to supporting vulnerable people and includes a focus on testing, evaluating and promoting good practice.

Community based signposting support and advocacy:

- The County Council is promoting the development of community connections, strengths and resources by initiating and trialling the development and co-ordination of local networks and mechanisms for support and signposting. These initiatives include Community Capacity Building, Good Neighbour Schemes, Local Area Co-ordination and Social Prescribing (where patients with social, emotional or practical needs are referred to a range of non-clinical services, often provided by the voluntary sector). First Contact Plus has been identified as the co-ordinating access point for accessing social prescribing solutions. The Service also provides advice and signposting relating to money, debt and benefits, work and unemployment, health and crisis support.

Financial inclusion:

- The formation of the Fair Finance Task Group and subsequent development of the Fair Finance Strategy is the focus of activity on financial inclusion. The County Council is a member of the Task Group and the initiative is considered in more detail below.

The Fair Finance Task Group

7. The Fair Finance Task Group was formed to take forward the action "to develop joint strategies concerning financial inclusion and fair finance" identified by the Bishop's Commission. The Group is chaired by Reverend Alison Adams of the Diocese of Leicester and its membership also includes Asra Housing Group/Moneywise, Clockwise Credit Union, LeicesterShire Citizens Advice Bureau, the City and County Councils, a District Council representative, the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership, the Chamber of Commerce, Reaching People and Voluntary Action Leicestershire.
8. The Group brings together organisations willing to work together to tackle financial inclusion issues using influence, pooling expertise and helping co-ordinate the deployment of resources. The Group produced a Fair Finance Strategy for Leicester and Leicestershire in June 2015. The Strategy identified a number of work-streams with a focus on improving support for people with low incomes, people who are unemployed and/or those who are most vulnerable.
9. Progress on the Strategy work-streams is co-ordinated, monitored and promoted by the Task Group. The County Council is committed to action in

support of the Strategy including overseeing delivery of the Signposting and Community Support Service to assist people in crisis and hardship, commissioning CAB services focused on vulnerable people and providing assistance with travel to work and work support. Details of work by the County Council that contributes to the Strategy priorities is set out at Appendix B. Future actions for the Task Group include:

- calling a banking summit to consider local financial service provision and to secure support from the sector to Strategy objectives
- promotion of affordable financial services such as those offered by the Clockwise Credit Union, and
- developing a Leicester and Leicestershire private sector landlord charter including commitments relating to the standard of homes and treatment of low income tenants in financial difficulty.

Co-ordination of County Council action

10. Enhanced co-ordination and development of the County Council's contribution to the above recommendations and the poverty agenda as a whole will be provided in future by the new officer level Communities Board that has been established to lead support for the delivery and development of the Communities Strategy which includes an asset based approach to work with communities (focused on strengths as well as needs of local communities). The Board will have oversight of the Council's approach to poverty, will contribute to and work within the context of the Strategic Plan and will provide increased co-ordination, direction and impetus for the various work-strands identified above. An audit of current work, priorities for future action and measures of progress will be reported to a future meeting of the Board.

Resource implications

11. The County Council activity identified in this report is funded from existing County Council and partnership resources. Proposals for a significant increase in support for people in crisis/hardship, as outlined under Priority 15 of Appendix B, will be subject to a joint Big Lottery 'Reaching Communities' funding bid.

Timetable for Decisions

12. Proposals for strategic policies and outcomes relating to work on poverty will be developed as part of the refresh of the Council's Strategic Plan. The draft refreshed Strategic Plan is proposed to be reported to Scrutiny Commission and Cabinet in December 2016/January 2017.

Conclusion

13. The Bishop's Poverty Commission report has done much to highlight the issues of poverty in Leicester and Leicestershire and to support and guide

action by the Diocese and partners. Action on debt and financial inclusion has been progressed as a priority by the Fair Finance Task Group and the County Council is a key strategic member of the Group. The Council is doing much to address issues raised in the Bishop's report and is working closely with partner organisations to progress the priorities of the Fair Finance Strategy. The Group is working to widen ownership and commitment to the Strategy amongst implementation organisations so as to further enhance delivery and co-ordination.

14. The views of Scrutiny Commission are sought on the above range of activity by the County Council that seeks to address and respond to the issues raised in the Bishop's Poverty Commission report. The Communities Board will take account of the views of Scrutiny Commission in providing strategic direction to the Council's work on poverty.

Background Papers

["How Do You Get By: Voices of Leicester and Leicestershire"](#), Bishop's Poverty Commission, Diocese of Leicester, February 2015

[Fair Finance Strategy for Leicester and Leicestershire](#), Damon Gibbons, Centre for Responsible Credit, June 2015

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A – Bishop's Poverty Commission Report "How Do You Get By: Voices of Leicester and Leicestershire"

Appendix B - County Council activity relating to the Fair Finance Strategy

Equality and Human Rights Implications

15. The initiatives to address poverty issues considered in this report are focused on providing support for vulnerable and disadvantaged people. Preventative services assist in reducing demand for acute/crisis support.