



REPORT TO: CORPORATE COMMITTEE 8 NOVEMBER 2022

SUBJECT: COUNCIL POVERTY PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE

BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of progress in developing a cross service whole council poverty action plan as part of the Council's strategic response to reducing poverty in Moray.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section II B(6) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to any new policy matter which does not fall within the terms of reference of any other Committee.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **It is recommended that the Committee considers and notes progress in developing a cross service whole council Poverty Action Plan as part of the Council's strategic response to reducing poverty in Moray and that a further report will come forward for determination of content and approach in early 2023.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 As part of the second phase of the Council's Improvement and Modernisation Programme, on 12 May 2021 the Council agreed to establish a resource to develop the Council's strategic response to reducing poverty in Moray. It was proposed that the project would define the issues and priorities, develop a cross service whole council Poverty Action Plan and develop proposals to meet gaps in activity to address agreed council priorities and co-ordinate activity and reporting across the plan. (para 13 of the minute refers)

Data Analysis

- 3.2 To progress this project, initial work focussed on gathering a comprehensive view of the national poverty environment, of the work already underway within Council services and across Community Planning partners and of the evidence base for poverty in Moray. Work has been undertaken to refresh the analysis of poverty data within Moray and to consider how different statistical measures combine to show a picture of poverty indicators across Moray. The aim was to objectively collate poverty evidence, issues and actions to identify gaps within the existing delivery of previously agreed council strategies and action plans without replicating or diverting from existing planned work.
- 3.3 The review of poverty data was undertaken using local and national data sources accumulated into geographical data zones to enable comparisons to be drawn. Due to the way in which data is gathered and reported, the data used covers timeframes between mid-2020 and early 2022. Analysis included consideration of statistics on benefits claimed; Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) data; and households below average income. From the analysis it became clear that as localities are aggregated up into larger geographies, distinctions between groupings are lost. For example, reviewing data as Associated School Group level showed little variation between the 8 localities, whereas analysis at a lower geographical level identified differences in poverty indicators. This level of data is often not used in national reporting where the smallest geography can be local authority area. However, it will continue to be taken into account in identifying issues and developing interventions in future council work to tackle poverty and has also been shared with the Fairer Moray Forum.
- 3.4 This analysis of poverty statistics for Moray showed significant differences when SIMD 2020 (geography based) data was compared with benefits (people based) data, and illustrates why SIMD data should not be used to assume that all people in an area with high levels of deprivation are deprived and possibly in poverty. It was also of note that locally claimed benefits are an important factor in evidencing local poverty, but these are not included in all national reporting (e.g. not used in “End Child Poverty” analysis).
- 3.5 Overall, the analysis confirmed that the current locality work being undertaken through the community planning partnership and by the council specifically is focussed in areas identified by the data: New Elgin East; Elgin Cathedral to Ashgrove and Pinefield; Forres South West and Mannachie; Buckie Central East; and Keith and Fife Keith. Locality work is also being actively supported in Lossiemouth in line with the decision of the Education Communities and Organisational Development Committee on 31 March 2021 (para 9 of the minute refers) as it also contains vulnerable communities according to poverty data. Therefore, there can be assurance taken that locality based work is addressing the areas where there is greatest need according to data analysis.

Review of Current Plans and Actions

- 3.6 The second area of work has been to collate information on the plans and activities that are already progressing within council services to address poverty in Moray. This has been prepared into the current working draft of an Anti-Poverty Assessment (**Appendix A**) which is designed to collate poverty actions and identify gaps. It sets out a summary of the drivers of poverty and poverty policy followed by a brief summary of relevant national legislation and policy directives that Moray Council is obliged to follow. It then explores existing local priorities, headline statistics and plans relating to the poverty agenda. An appraisal review of poverty actions drawn from other local plans relevant to existing council service delivery is also included at the end of the assessment.
- 3.7 This assessment illustrates the extensive range of actions that are already contained in specific plans to address poverty in Moray. It is of note that there are also a number of actions included in service plans that contribute to this agenda, although not all of these are currently captured in the assessment. Reference has also been made to the poverty action plan developed by the Fairer Moray Forum in 2018 on behalf of the community planning partnership to identify actions where further work could be taken forward. The actions from plans have been grouped thematically along with additional relevant poverty actions that could address identified gaps to give an indication of areas to be explored further for inclusion within a co-ordinated and monitored Moray Council poverty action plan (table 1 in the Assessment).
- 3.8 This working draft is provided to committee to demonstrate the range of work that is underway and provide assurance on progress towards a whole council poverty action plan. However, it should be noted that this is work in progress and that in particular the actions highlighted in green require to be updated and reviewed as there has been progress against some, and in other cases work has moved on. Work will continue on these to ensure that the eventual plan is focussed and current.

Next Steps

- 3.9 Ideally, a strategic policy statement that sets out the Council's aims and vision for reducing poverty would have been the starting point to direct and inform actions. However, the poverty agenda has grown organically from roots upwards in Moray, which provides strong links to local and specific issues as well as addressing national themes and, as the assessment demonstrates, this provides a strong platform from which to move forward. The next stage of work will include the development of a strategic cross cutting set of aims that provide a shared vision of the council priorities in addressing poverty in Moray. This will be used to create a cohesive cross cutting agenda to direct collective and individual service effort and ensure limited resources are appropriately directed to priority work.

- 3.10 The next stage for the anti-poverty assessment is to review the assessment in conjunction with service managers across the Council to bring actions together into a poverty action plan to support the strategy and to report this to committee.

Cost of Living

- 3.11 On 29 June 2022 (paragraph 22 of the minute refers) the Council agreed to establish a Cost of Living Working Group in response to the escalating financial issues emerging from the wider economic environment. The Group has met twice and has agreed terms of reference and an initial set of actions to be drawn into a short term rapid response piece of work. This will aim to support the immediate wider issues that are emerging and to sit alongside the longer term approach to reducing poverty.

Governance

- 3.12 In parallel with the above, the governance arrangements relating to poverty work across the community planning partnership have been reviewed with a view to ensuring that the agenda is joined up and directed to the priorities of the partnership and this includes a number of areas involving council services and so will also support the integration of the poverty agenda within the council.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

The delivery of Poverty Actions within this report will directly contribute to the LOIP aims of 'Raising Aspirations': Moray provides an enabling environment where residents can achieve expanded choices, improved livelihood and wellbeing.

(b) Policy and Legal

There are no specific policy or legal implications arising from this report. The undernoted are highlighted by way of background context.

The Community Empowerment Act 2015 places specific duties on Community Planning Partnerships to produce a local outcomes improvement plan (LOIP) with a particular a focus on actions aligned to addressing the poorest outcomes and to prepare locality plans.

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 places a duty on local authorities and health boards to produce an annual local child poverty action report and national guidance suggests that this is developed collaboratively with local partners.

Both of the above are addressed through arrangements with community planning partners

(c) Financial implications

None at this time.

(d) Risk Implications

The following risks were noted in establishing this piece of work and remain relevant.

- Inability to resource and action solutions to address the issues once defined;
- Creating expectations around solving a complex societal issue – a range of interventions will aim to make improvements but the combination of influencing factors make it difficult to measure a causal link with change;
- Breaking into a complex and diverse existing environment that has grown within specific service areas and is not currently co-ordinated corporately may mean conflicting priorities or resistance to overall direction; existing commitments need to be honoured so limiting the scope for new impact;
- National requirements frame the agenda in some areas (mainly with funding) with local activity being a discretionary addition, therefore, can change in priority based on available resources, national asks and local politics giving an uncertain and inconsistent working environment.

(e) Staffing Implications

The post of Senior Policy Officer (Poverty) was agreed as part of the report to the Council on 12 May 2021 (para 13 refers) and this post was recruited to in October 2021. Two further posts: Policy and Research Office and Apprentice Researcher were also identified in the project proposal with the intention that these posts would be activated once there was greater specification to the work required.

Subsequently on 30 August 2022, the Corporate Committee considered an update report on the Improvement and Modernisation Programme (para 6 of the minute refers) which identified that consideration of further resourcing would be linked to the direction from committee following planned report on strategic approach. As this work is not yet concluded, the issue of staffing resources will be addressed in the next report to committee.

(f) Property

None

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

Delivery of anti-poverty actions will have a demonstrable and quantifiable positive impact on equalities and the socio economic health of Moray.

(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts

None at this time

(i) Consultations

There have been 2 workshops held, one with Council officers and one with the Fairer Moray Forum and wider Community Planning partners. The information gathered has been utilised to form the appendix to this report. The Corporate Management Team has been consulted on the assessment set out in the appendix and is supportive of the general direction of this work.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The work that has been progressed to prepare a poverty assessment to identify current plans and activities that are already progressing within council services to address poverty in Moray demonstrates the range of work that is already in place. Work will continue to finalise this assessment and report back to committee to establish clear strategic vision and direction to inform and direct this work moving forward and to address any gaps following further work to explore these more fully.**

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Background Papers:	Poverty Data Analysis Moray Community Planning Partnership Poverty Strategy & Action Plan (Community Planning Board 18 April 2018) Children's Services Action Plan Local Employability Partnership Plan Local Housing Strategy
Ref:	SPMAN-1468114179-39 / SPMAN-1468114179-40