

IS Discussion Paper on the Supporting Step Change Process in South Lanarkshire

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Background:

- 1.1 South Lanarkshire Community Planning Partnership is delivering an impressive range of anti-poverty activity and has a strong partnership approach to developing and implementing its Local Child Poverty Action Report (LCPAR). However, despite this strong partnership approach - and the clear commitment of senior management evident from SLs last three LCPARS - families with children in South Lanarkshire are likely to come under increased financial pressure. The impact of COVID-19, increases in the cost of living and an uncertain financial context mean there is a need for South Lanarkshire – and every local authority area in Scotland – to ‘step-up’ their action to tackle child poverty.
2. With this in mind, South Lanarkshire’s Child Poverty Lead Officer Group/ LCPAR working group approached the Improvement Service (IS) looking for external facilitation and support to identify improvements and bring about a ‘step change’ in their efforts to tackle child poverty. In particular the LCPAR Group wanted to identify areas for joint partnership actions which might increase the impact of their work and have maximum impact on families in poverty.
3. This request was welcomed by the Improvement Service and wider Child Poverty National Partners (including SPIRU and Public Health Scotland) as an opportunity to work closely with a local partnership and better understand how self-assessment and improvement methodologies might be used in conjunction to support step change in relation to action on child poverty at local level.
4. This brief report is intended to
 - Give an overview of the process and techniques employed by SLC and the Improvement Service to support the ‘step-change process’
 - Highlight commitments made to date by South Lanarkshire Council and its Community Planning Partners and seek to assess the extent to which they constitute a ‘step-change’
 - Identify potential next steps for SLC and its local partners to continue with the step change process
 - Identify potential next steps for the Improvement Service and national partners (including the Scottish Government) to support step change in South Lanarkshire
 - Reflect on where improvements might be made to tools and processes employed such as the Child Poverty Self-Assessment Framework, Outcome Based Planning Tool and an Improvement Focused Planning Session.

Summary of Impact

Overall, the Step Change process proved to be extremely valuable for both the South Lanarkshire Child Poverty Group and the Improvement Service.

For **South Lanarkshire**, the process resulted in the clarification of the partnership's desired approach to tackling child poverty which is to be characterised by:

- Increased focus on joint working and the pooling of expertise and resources to deliver additional value through the LCPAR group and the organisations it represents.
- Commitment to an increasingly evidence based, outcome focused approach which gives particular consideration to the needs of the priority groups at highest risk of child poverty.
- Systematic involvement of people with lived experience and the third sector in policy development, decision-making and delivery.
- Long term, strategic thinking. The partners are currently giving consideration to whether three or five year tackling poverty / child poverty strategies – supplemented by annual progress reports - might help support a more holistic, preventative approach.
- Consideration is also being given by the group as to what the South Lanarkshire approach looks like in practice, with commitment to explore the following actions – cutting across the key drivers of child poverty - in more detail.

Income from Employment

In terms of changes to policy and service delivery, South Lanarkshire committed to exploration of delivering a truly holistic employment support service for parents in the most deprived areas of South Lanarkshire. This would seek to embody and test the ways of working identified above. It would, for example,

- Take a holistic, partnership approach to provide intuitive wrap-around support to parents on their employment journey from unemployment to in-work progression.
- Take a data driven approach by using existing data (e.g. UC claims, SIMD, relative child poverty data zone map) to identify several areas with high rates/risk of child poverty which are not currently, expressly targeted by parental employability support.
- Incorporate the views and experiences of people with lived experience of poverty
- Draw on unique insights from the third sector around the barriers experienced by parents in the priority groups.
- Focus on parents and particularly parents in the priority groups by considering, for example, the cost, flexibility and accessibility of childcare as a barrier to work and in-work progression, with particular reference to disabled children.
- Develop enhanced baseline information and monitoring framework to ensure impact on poverty, wellbeing - including wellbeing of wider family - is understood.

Income from Social Security

The group agreed that there is scope to build on the positive impact that routine inquiry and active referral from health settings has had on income maximisation among low income households with children in South Lanarkshire. In particular, it was agreed that social work and education settings might benefit from direct active referral routes.

In relation to social work, the Early Help Hub and the Beacons Community Recovery Hub were identified as two settings which might benefit from the incorporation of routine enquiry.

In relation to education, it was also agreed that the partnership would seek to embed income maximisation in education settings, specifically through funding additional support and referral roles in early years and school settings.

South Lanarkshire's Local Child Poverty Action Report 2022

Short term impact on the work of the South Lanarkshire partners can be evidenced through a bespoke improvement chapter in the LCPAR 2022, reflecting journey, capacity building process and growing commitment to step change and improvement activity. This includes four distinct step change priorities of:

1. Successful extension of routine enquiry activity and active referral beyond existing pathways
2. Developing holistic, wraparound support for parents to guide them through obstacles to employment (skills, childcare transport, mental health, benefit entitlement) and beyond
3. Working together to reduce the impact of energy and household bill increases on families with children experiencing or at risk of child poverty (including the priority groups)
4. Working together with the Together Alliance to test new ways of gathering the voice of children, young people and families to inform future child poverty planning decisions

For the **Improvement Service**, the process helped clarify the need for action at a national level to help remove some of the barriers that prevent local partnerships from taking a strategic approach to tackling child poverty. These barriers include:

- Lack of clarity in relation to how existing data might be analysed to provide meaningful insight into need and priority setting in the local area, particularly with regard to the priority groups.
- A lack of clarity as to what is permissible in relation to data sharing to address child poverty
- Lack of capacity/expertise on how the impact of holistic approaches to supporting households can be monitored, evaluated and understood

National partners should give renewed consideration to how these barriers might be effectively addressed at national level.

Feedback from SL LCPAR Group has also highlighted opportunities for improvement in the support provided by national partners in relation to the Step Change process. These included:

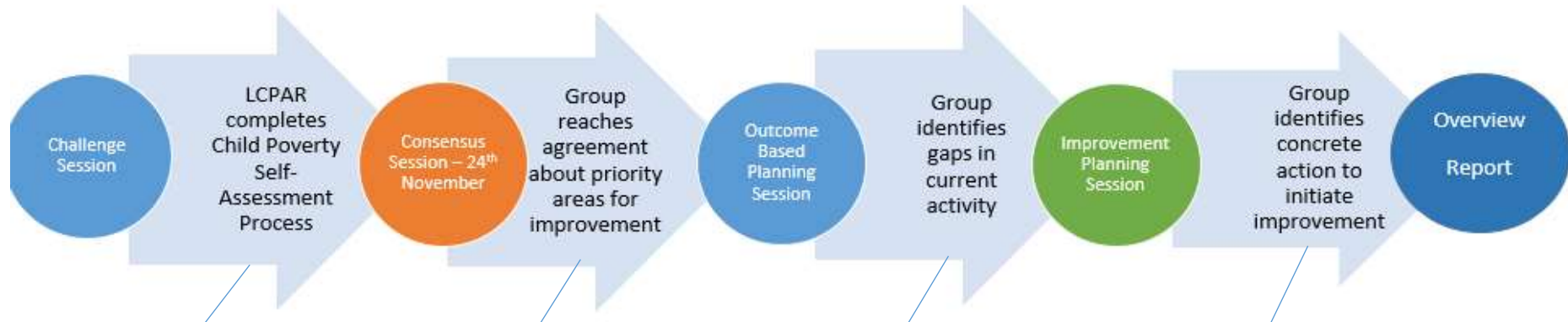
- The need for a clearer and more structured offer of support
- The need to focus on actions (rather than general areas for improvement) at an earlier stage in the process.

Use of the self-assessment tool flagged up potential gaps and areas for improvement – including the need for the tool to address the question of how accessible and intuitive the ‘child poverty system’ is to families and, secondly, the extent to which the joint duty to produce LCPARs is resulting in added value or additionality (rather than being a compilation of pre-existing activity).

Reflections on ensuring continued improvement in South Lanarkshire

- The process has highlighted the high level of commitment within the South Lanarkshire Child Poverty Action Group and a desire to work in meaningful partnership to drive change and continuous improvement. Bringing about the planned changes and – in particular – piloting a holistic, multi-agency approach to parental employment, will require high level commitment from all partners.
- Consideration might be given to how funding streams announced through the Scottish Government’s Child Poverty Delivery Plan ‘Best Start, Bright Futures’ might be used to support a shift towards this approach. The Whole Family Wellbeing Funding, Parental Employability Support Funding and local Child Poverty Accelerator Fund might be of particular interest.
- We would encourage the South Lanarkshire Child Poverty Action Group to continue to engage and draw on learning from the voluntary sector and approaches that have proved particularly successful in reaching the priority groups. E.g. Clyde Gateway’s work to support parental employability through schools.
- We would be grateful if South Lanarkshire would report their progress to the Local Child Poverty Peer Support Network as they continue to take this step change forward.

Overview of the Step Change Process in South Lanarkshire



The LCPAR Group used the self- assessment tool to highlight strengths and areas for improvement under four headings:

- Understanding Local Need
- Using a Wide Range of Policy Levers
- Ways of Working
- Understanding Our Progress

Strengths included strong commitment, use of range of policy levers and good understanding of local context.

The group used the consensus approach to reach agreement on the need for a refreshed SL approach to child poverty characterised by:

- More engagement of those with lived experience and the 3rd sector
- Holistic, intuitive, ‘wraparound’ services for those at risk of child poverty
- Outcome focused and data driven decision making

Through Outcome Based Planning the group identified specific gaps and areas for improvement in current provision (aligned with SL approach) including need for:

- More holistic, parent focused employability support.
- Intuitive entry points and movement between services to avoid siloes
- More focus on tackling the cost of living – particularly housing & fuel poverty

The group identified concrete actions intended to move the partnership towards realising ‘South Lanarkshire Approach’ including:

- Commitment to more streamlined, collaborative approach to LCPAR reporting.
- Establishment of Data, Research and Lived Experience Sub Groups
- Identification of specific, timed, partnership actions to address gaps identified through the improvement process.

Areas of Discussion

Through the process outlined above the South Lanarkshire Local Child Poverty Action Group identified the following areas for improvement (highlighted in green) and specific actions to take them forward. Learning for the Improvement Service (IS) and other national child poverty partners is also set out.

Improvement Resulting from the Supporting Step-change Process

The need to prioritise improved engagement with households with lived experience was agreed at the consensus session.

Improvement Statement One: The partnership should develop mechanisms to ensure that policy development and service delivery are influenced by meaningful and ongoing dialogue with those experiencing poverty (including families in the priority groups).

Subsequent discussion resulted in agreement around the following actions.

- The group agreed to conduct a mapping exercise to better understand how and where local services are already engaging with households with lived experience of poverty and how the intelligence collected is being used to shape plans and service delivery. It was decided that particular consideration should be given to where current gaps in engagement are. In relation, for instance, to traditionally hard-to-engage groups/communities.
- The LCPAR Partnership has also since established a Lived Experience Sub-Group to take forward the mapping exercise and put forward options as to how gaps in engagement might be addressed.

The need to engage in a more meaningful way with the third sector was also agreed at the consensus session.

Improvement Statement Two: Given their integral role in tackling poverty and strong links with communities (including those in the priority groups), third sector organisations will be more involved and at strategic level in efforts to tackle child poverty in South Lanarkshire.

It was agreed that more could be done at a strategic level to build on the relationships galvanised during the COVID -19 pandemic.

In particular, the group agreed to proactively engage with South Lanarkshire's Third Sector Chief Officers Group to identify opportunities for closer working with the Child Poverty Lead Officer's Group.

A representative of that group has since joined the LCPAR Group.

Improvement Statement 3: Partners should examine how existing data could be used to better understand the distribution of poverty at households and locality level.

Improvement Statement 4: The partnership should consider more comprehensive evaluation of services and interventions to better understand the impact on households (including those in the priority groups).

There was agreement that while much of South Lanarkshire's policy is informed by data and intelligence, more could be done to build a more detailed and granular picture of child poverty in South Lanarkshire. It was agreed this could help to target resources and inform better decision making.

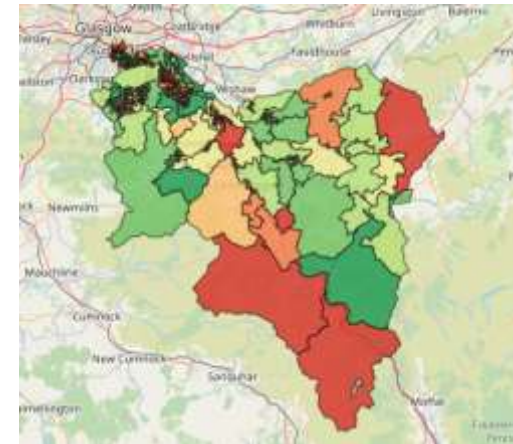
In response, the Improvement Service produced a data zone level map for South Lanarkshire – and all 32 local authority areas in Scotland – of Children in Low Income Household, jointly produced by HMRC and DWP. This helps give a visual indication of where rates of child poverty are highest within South Lanarkshire.

It was decided that a realignment of roles locally might also help the LCPAR make best use of existing data. As such it was proposed that the existing Children's Services Planning Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (CSP JSNA) Data Task Group should take on the role of the Gathering Child Poverty Data group. It was agreed that the data group will meet two to three times between June and October 2022 to look at data for a new Child Poverty profile, linked to the next LCPAR and CSP JSNA.

It was also decided that the pre-existing child poverty Research Group should be more aligned with the strategic priorities identified by LCPAR group and areas for improvement process identified through the Step Change process.

Improvement Statement 5: Obstacles to data sharing within and between partners should be identified and addressed so that partners can build a shared understanding of poverty at household, neighbourhood and locality level.

It was agreed that a lack of clarity about when data and intelligence about low income and/or vulnerable households could be shared was acting as a barrier, both to the delivery of intuitive, holistic services and the partnerships understanding of the level, depth and location of child poverty in the area.



It was agreed that the partnership would explore opportunities to upskill staff around GDPR legislation and – in particular – when it is helpful and legitimate to share information.

It should be noted that lack of clarity around data sharing arrangements and when it is legitimate and legal to share information has been raised in many local authority areas across Scotland. It may, therefore, be more expedient to explore this lack of knowledge and the need for training and development to be addressed at national level. There are in fact, discussion happening in a number of settings with a range of stakeholders exploring this issue and it was outlined in the national tackling child poverty delivery plan Best Start, Bright Futures.

South Lanarkshire may also wish to consider employing Public Health Scotland's Tackling Child Poverty: A Data and Systems Approach to map out how local services forming part of the 'child poverty system' communicate and where data might be shared more readily.

Improvement Statement 6: The partnership will deliver more holistic, wraparound support services which are as accessible as possible to families experiencing poverty (including the priority households).

At the consensus session, the LCPAR group prioritised the need to ensure services are as accessible and as useful as possible to families at risk of, or experiencing poverty. At a subsequent session (the outcomes based planning session) the group went on to identify concrete areas for improvement which the group believe would have the most significant impact on rates of child poverty in South Lanarkshire. Employment and employability were identified as key areas for improvement.

The group agreed there was a need for members to work together to develop holistic, wraparound support for parents to guide them through obstacles to employment. It was agreed that this should incorporate support with skills, accessing childcare, transport, good mental health and income maximisation. In particular, it should be characterised by the avoidance of silos (i.e. not developing a separate service just for parents, but ensuring gateways to support exist in family settings such as schools and nurseries, and all staff are aware of barriers and support available for parents). Work is required to map existing provision, referral routes and existing customer journeys in those areas. Taking whole family unit approaches could help to address income from social security, cost of living, wellbeing, housing, transport, childcare etc.

A need was identified to develop multi-agency approaches - including training - to ensure shared understanding of services and allow frontline workers to refer into services.

Members agreed that piloting a holistic approach to parental employability would be a good opportunity to incorporate all the areas for improvement identified to date during the process. This includes:

- Additionality and partnership working

- Taking a data driven approach by using existing data (e.g. UC claims, SIMD, relative child poverty data zone map) to identify several areas with high rates/risk of child poverty which are not currently, expressly targeted by parental employability support.
- Incorporating as far as possible the voice of people with lived experience of poverty and of using South Lanarkshire's services.
- Learning from the unique perspective of the third sector, in this case the learning of the Clyde Gateway approach to date – particularly in relation to the barriers experienced by parents in the priority groups.
- Focusing on parents, and particularly parents in the priority groups, by considering, for example, the cost, flexibility and accessibility of childcare as a barrier to work and in-work progression, with particular reference to disabled children.
- Develop an enhanced baseline information and monitoring framework to ensure impact on poverty and wellbeing (including wellbeing of wider family) is understood.

A subgroup of members of the LCPAR group have committed to meet again to discuss whether identified areas are suitable for a place based, holistic approach to supporting parental employability support [including support to access benefits and reduce the cost of living – not just employment].

The subgroup will also explore sources of funding for extension of services shown to be effective and/or implementing pilot approaches in identified deprived areas. Relevant funding streams might potentially include the Pathfinder funding announced in the Scottish Government Child Poverty Delivery Strategy 'Best Start, Bright Futures', the Whole Families Wellbeing Funding (WFWF) and the Parental Employability Support Fund.

Improvement Statement 7: In order to ensure it is adding value (over and above existing provision) the partnership should consider developing shared short, medium and long term outcomes and identify the necessary resources to work collaboratively towards them.

The need for the LCPAR Group (and wider Community Planning Partners) to add value through their joint work - rather than merely compiling existing actions through their Child Poverty Action Report - was raised on numerous occasions.

While the group did not reach the point of identifying shared outcomes, it did carve out areas for joint work where they felt value could be added through joint work. In particular, the group felt there was scope to build on the positive impact routine inquiry and active referral from health settings had had on income maximisation among low income households with children in South Lanarkshire.

The group subsequently agreed that social work would benefit from introducing a tool to extend routine enquiry. The Early Help Hub and The Beacons Community Recovery Hub were identified as two setting which might benefit from the incorporation of routine enquiry. It was also

agreed that, in future, the group should seek to embed income maximisation in education by funding roles that employ education officers who can increase accessibility of benefits to parents.

South Lanarkshire's Local Child Poverty Action Report 2022

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This includes four distinct step change priorities of:

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3. Working together to reduce the impact of energy and household bill increases on families with children experiencing or at risk of child poverty (including the priority groups)
4. Working together with the Together Alliance to test new ways of gathering the voice of children, young people and families to inform future child poverty planning decisions