

Report of the Joint Session of Local Employability Leads and Local Child Poverty Leads, November 2021



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Background

In November 2021 the Improvement Service and SLAED (supported by COSLA) hosted an online event bringing together local child poverty leads and employability leads from across Scotland to consider how learning from delivery of the Parental Employability Support Fund to date might inform local and national policy and service delivery in future.

The meeting was particularly timely given the Scottish Government’s ongoing consultation on its next Child Poverty Delivery Plan and its recent commitment to invest at least a further £15 million across 2022-24 to help low income families identified as being most at risk of experiencing poverty to increase their earnings, **by gaining and progressing in fair work, providing intensive, person-centred key worker employability support.**

The following report gives an overview of some of the views expressed at that event (through group discussion and an online poll) as well as drawing examples of action to address parental employability drawn from the third round of Local Child poverty Action Reports.

The report also draws out points of future consideration for local and national partners in relation to parental employability.

Key Considerations Arising from the Event

Key points arising from the event for both local and national partners included the need to:

- Seek to align Local Child Poverty Action Plans with the Employability Delivery Plans including shared consistent actions and measures
- Agree some common data sets and targets to inform both local employability investment plans and local child poverty action reports
- Seek to ensure data from *all* employability programmes is disaggregated by parent/non-parent and by the child poverty priority groups – with consideration given to the intersectionality of characteristics.
- Explore how – where it is suitable, appropriate and proportionate - local and national data-sharing arrangements might allow information and services to be proactively targeted at low income parents, particularly those in the priority groups.
- Ensure meaningful and ongoing involvement of service users and those with lived experience of poverty in service design and delivery.
- Ensure appropriate governance and partnership infrastructure that draws the strategic links between child poverty and employability and is aligned under Community Planning Partnerships structures.
- Continue to progress and resource a shift towards a whole systems, person-centred approach to child poverty and parental employability including consideration of the availability and affordability of transport, childcare and housing. Examples of where this is being implemented successfully should be shared.
- Continue to engage and support public and private sector employers at local and national level to provide flexible, well-paid employment opportunities and routes to upskilling and career progression that are accessible to parents and carers. This could include accelerating dissemination and implementation of the Timewise toolkit. Employers may be particularly receptive to this message given current labour shortages in many areas.
- Employability, child poverty and childcare leads in particular should work together to map service user touch points to develop a “no wrong door approach” approach, strengthen referral pathways and identify reachable moments to support parents experiencing poverty
- Local areas should continue to work towards better integration and alignment of services locally and ‘hide the wiring’ in order to simplifying access to employability and other wrap around services that provide holistic support. This should be centred on ensuring parents get the help they require, when they need it and in a way that meets their needs.
- Particular consideration should be given to the unique and additional barriers faced by parents and carers in remote and rural areas.
- The Scottish Government should seek to provide longer term, reliable and flexible funding to support employability and wider services to address child poverty.
- A place based approach should be supported as the default position and include health, advice and well-being services

Context

The session commenced with a presentation around the role of labour market policy in tackling child poverty. This included some reflection on the role of government(s) in the labour market. It was noted that the

Through No-One Left Behind (NOLB), the Scottish Government - in partnership with Local Government - is committed to delivering an all age, needs led, person centred approach. In seeking to deliver such an approach it is important to question what the barriers and impediments to implementing existing labour market policies in an effective way are. The answer to this question may provide good insight in terms of where to focus acceleration and allow us to identify which existing policies are working well, why and where the gaps are.

Discussion at the Event

Local collaboration around parental employability

As part of the introductory session, participants were asked to consider the strength of the relationship between those leading on child poverty and those leading on employability at local level as well as where there might be scope for this to be strengthened to help ensure a joined up, collaborative approach. Discussion at the event – as well as a rapid review of year 3 LCPARs and the mentimeter poll suggest that links are strengthening but that there is still scope for improvement.

On a scale of 1 – 5 (1 being low) how would you rate the level of local joint working around child poverty and employability?



In some cases the strengthening of links was attributed to the additional resource and focus provided by Scottish Government investment in the PESF. Comments raised during the session and in a subsequent survey to participants included the following:

*“There is improved awareness of the drivers of poverty and an understanding on how this can impact on children and families. **More funding from Scottish Government has helped to create new and innovative ways to support children and families.** In my experience partners*

are working in collaboration to respond to local need taking the initiative and additional funding to try new approaches.”

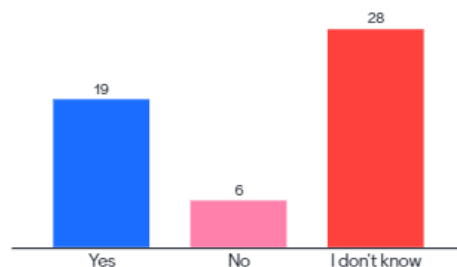
Participants also highlighted that the legislative duty to produce a local child poverty action report had helped create mechanisms for closer working at local level.

*“Our Child Poverty Group and the production of CP action plan **provide a forum and mechanism for partners to feed in their experience**, often based on lived experience and needs being presented to them, of what is happening locally. **This need is captured and reflected in local actions and interventions**. This local intelligence gathering has continued throughout the Covid pandemic as partners fed into our system what they were seeing through their services e.g. increased financial hardship in families.”*

This demonstrates the active involvement of services users in contributing to the design and delivery of local services supporting the No One Left behind (NOLB) principles and the move to adopting the Scottish Approach to Service Design.

However, polling from the event also highlighted that there is still scope for better communication locally within Councils and across partnerships. 53% of attendees were unclear on whether parental poverty reduction targets had been included in the local employability delivery plans. This suggests closing working at a strategic level between employability and child poverty leads at local level might be beneficial. The NOLB Data Toolkit will assist in drawing these links and articulating the nature and scale of activity required across different policy areas.

Are there local targets to reduce parental poverty within local employability delivery plans?



There was also a recognition that while employability support has a key role in tackling child poverty, there has to be collaboration with a wide range of partners to ensure a comprehensive approach to tackling child poverty.

*“There was a recognition [in our group] that child poverty is a huge issue to overcome and requires commitment and collaboration across various organisations, recognition of employability as a contributing factor is positive, however there is a need to ensure **long term sustainable solutions and the roots of child poverty are being targeted through wider interventions**.”*

The need to work in partnership with employers was also noted with one participant commenting,

“Employer engagement and regular coms to support organisations re offer is needed.”

In terms of future actions, several participants highlighted that it was useful to bring local together employability and child poverty leads from across the country to share practice and build stronger relationships locally. There was also support for the need to strive towards an ever more joined up

approach at local level, including a strategic role for an extended range of community planning partners, through the Local Employability Partnerships. Several participants highlighted that this would require

“Greater collaboration, partnership working/agreements, shared commitment and a corporate leadership.”

This was seen as necessary by some employability leads to iron out *“competing and differing outcomes, misconceptions around employability support and the perception that it provides a narrow range of support.”*

Reaching and engaging with parents

Participants at the event were encouraged to discuss the approaches to engaging parents with employability support at local level. Examples of useful touchpoints included the following.

“The best hook we have for engaging parents is helping them to apply for the new devolved benefits (Scottish Child Payment, Best Starts Grants).”

“Helping parents access virtual training and IT devices, linking in to the Connecting Scotland digital inclusion programme”

The importance of engaging with parents through wider local partners was also evidenced from the following examples,

“School bag leaflet drop following attendance at Head Teachers meeting (including secondary, primary and ELC)”

“Partnership working with CLD, DWP, Business Gateway, Carr Gomm, Education”

“Working with families who are involved in statutory engagement on a more informal level has improved relationships and broken down barriers to engagement... We can't underestimate the value of having fun!”

There was also discussion about how existing relationship and information about families held locally and nationally (e.g. by Social Security Scotland and DWP) might allow for a more targeted approach.

“It's frustrating. They [national agencies] know who our target families are but we have to go by indirect and labour intensive routes to tell them what we can offer”

Numerous participants also highlighted that word of mouth and 'success stories' from parents themselves were some of the most powerful tools of engagement. One noted,

“What is working? Making every contact count, conversations to feed into qualitative data and good news stories to promote service”

There are also several examples of interesting approaches to engaging parents in the Year 3 Local Child Poverty Action Reports

Glasgow: The Family Nurse Partnership will also have, for the first time, **an employability advisor (funded from the Youth Guarantee Fund) to support young parents towards employment.** Furthermore, following the success of the Glasgow “Deep End Advice Worker Project”, where GPs and frontline staff made referrals through a secure online system to an advice worker, the Scottish Government announced a two-year funding package to support the development and evaluation of **Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships** in 150 General Practices in Scotland. This will enable the delivery of regulated, accredited advice on income maximisation, welfare benefits/social security, debt resolution, housing and employability, and provide representation for patients at tribunals.

Renfrewshire: Invest Renfrewshire engage regularly with staff from DWP to remind them of the eligibility criteria for PESF. Recently the referral form was updated to ensure that **PESF eligible clients would be identified at the very early stages.** This has led to an increase in the number of suitable participants being referred. To help raise awareness, Invest in Renfrewshire staff share PES information on local Facebook pages, and have also sent out PESF leaflets with all 80,000 Council Tax bills this year. Invest also attract eligible parents through campaigns on their website and social media platforms. This has included a campaign to target parents, who meet the criteria, and are currently on furlough to offer an early intervention opportunity and utilise their free time now to develop skills, gain qualifications which will enable them to improve their future employment prospects.

Practical barriers to engaging with parents were also identified, many as a result of the COVID pandemic.

“COVID restrictions has made school based engagement difficult.”

“The lack of face-to-face contact is a barrier to building relationships and assessing parents' needs.”

“The biggest barrier is not being able to network, face to face, with other organisations and parents due to Covid 19. Not all parents have digital devices or decent Wi-Fi connections due to the rurality of our area.”

Improving pathways for parents

There was also discussion about how to ensure parents could find – or be directed to – the appropriate employability support. While referral from frontline services was discussed at length, some felt that current referral processes into employability services are overly complicated and can result in ‘drop-off’ of parents (and referral agencies) who might feel confused or overwhelmed by the process.

“[We could improve this] by trying to simplify the referral process so that we only require minimal information from partners/providers.”

“The landscape feels cluttered and confusing to practitioners as I’m sure it does to parents. Any practice sharing or support to simplify the information that’s available about the range of services for parents/families. Support to develop simple info sharing portals.”

“We need to employ navigators. However we also need to be clear on who the navigators are and where they sit. We also need, for example, GP link workers, and some areas that Health Visitors and midwifery can give advice on, plus hubs through third sector organisations. Overall we need clarity and sustained roles, and up to date information that can be accessed by everyone.”

A number of Local Authorities have introduced a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to support a simplified referral process providing a supported gateway to services and the engagement with a key worker to make it easier for individuals to engage. At national level, service user journey maps have been developed to support a ‘no wrong door’ approach to employability and it would be beneficial to consider the extent to which these currently apply and how they might be refreshed and updated to reflect local circumstances.

Providing holistic support

Another theme that emerged strongly from the event is how employability – and often the Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF) – is being embedded within the context of wider support and services for parents and families. Participants commonly described how to support with ‘finding a job’ or progressing in work was not provided in isolation and that parents were often provided with wrap around support such as,

“Improving skills or work experience; money advice and motivational support. Eligible parents are also supported to access free early learning and childcare places.”

This was seen as a necessary approach given that parents – and particularly those in the priority groups face “a wide range of multi-faceted barriers to work – whether that’s skills, confidence, a lack of time, support or childcare”.

Examples from the Year 3 LCPARs usefully highlight how the needs of parents and particularly parents and families can be reflected in the kind of wrap-around support provided.

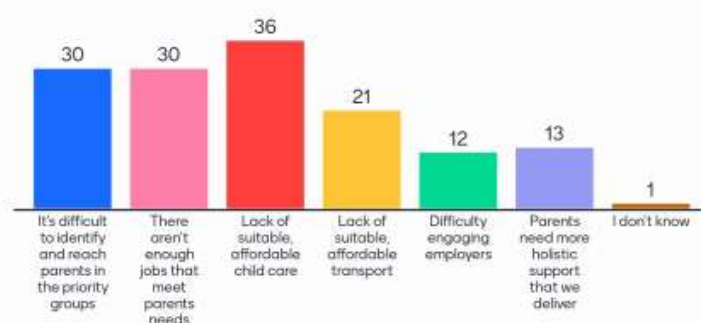
West Lothian 2020/21 saw the introduction of the intensive family support offer to the Access2Employment service. This service is delivered in conjunction with the Families Together Team within Social Policy. The programme targets the hardest to reach families that are engaging with the Families Together Team and provides employability support. This support is provided to clients as a long term offer and takes into consideration that many of the clients will be extremely far removed from the labour market and will need intensive ongoing support to find work, training or education that suits them and their family. This is also the first time that the service has offered a **full family approach** and has begun working with children in the family to encourage a positive outlook with regards employability and what is required to pursue their chosen career.

West Lothian - The WomenN2Work course was first delivered remotely in August 2020 and was delivered a further four times during the year. The six-week programme is aimed at women that are considering entering or returning to the labour market. The personal development aspect of the course is delivered by the Wellbeing Team and covers topics such as emotional and physical wellbeing, setting healthy boundaries, identifying unhelpful thinking and negative stories, creating healthy routines, goal setting, action planning and motivation. Once the personal development part of the course is completed it moves onto employability sessions. This part of the course covers topics such as job searching, preparing a CV and covering letter, completing application forms, and interview preparation and techniques.

Barriers to parental employment

Participants were asked to identify what they believed to be the three key barriers to parental employment in their area.

What are the biggest barriers to supporting parents into employment in your area (you can choose up to 3)



Childcare

Childcare was repeatedly highlighted as a major barrier to parental employment. One participant noted,

"Finding suitable childcare in the early years – and after school – can be a headache. Often the costs involved, like deposits (even if they aren't supposed to ask for those any more) are prohibitive and the provision isn't flexible enough from one week to the next. There is also a shortage of wraparound care"

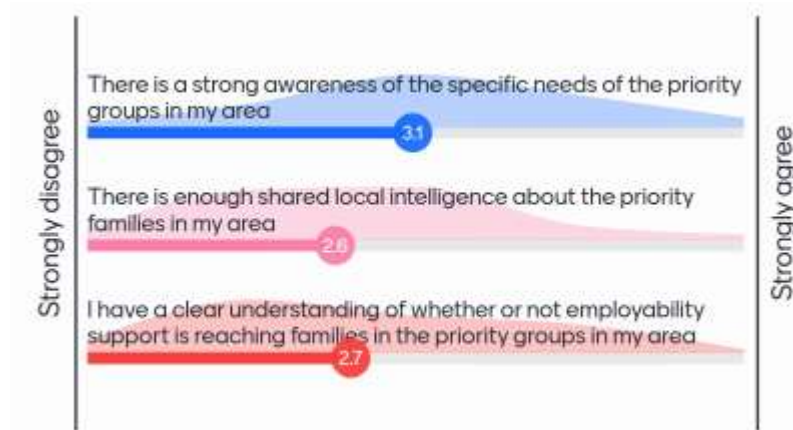
The particular barriers faced by those in the priority groups was also raised.

"There is a lack of childcare for children with ASN and disabilities out with school provision, this makes it difficult for parents to engage and sustain work out with school hours, during school breaks and at weekends, there is also no wrap around specialist childcare for parents of disabled children which makes it difficult for work."

Identifying and engaging with parents in the priority household types

While polling at the event highlighted some confidence that there was an awareness of the needs of priority families at local level, there was less confidence around determining whether local services

were managing to reach and engage these households. There was also a sense that more could be done to ensure data about the priority groups is shared amongst local partners.



Some feel there is more that could be done at national level to ensure local partners have adequate information to fully understand local need.

“More sharing of local data by Scottish Government would be useful and allowing LAs the flexibility to determine which target groups to focus resources on”

At local level one attendee suggested employing a *“dedicated worker on Priority Parents - organising holistic support -everything from welfare rights referrals to sorting out funding for childcare”*

In most areas dedicated key workers provided the personalised holistic support but it is recognised in many areas better integration and alignment is required across a range of local services. While there is clearly scope for increased awareness of the needs of priority families and better data gathering and sharing, year 3 LCPAR reports highlight examples of employability services targeted specifically at these groups.

North Ayrshire: The We Work for Families Programme specifically engages with parents of young children under five, particularly women, who may find it difficult for a range of reasons to take the next step to realising their potential.

Fife: Families - Square Start is a fully inclusive service for families including lone parents across Fife which concentrates on the makeup of the family and designed to break down barriers either perceived or actual, digitally include families, reduce social isolation, improve mental wellbeing, increase confidence in children and increase confidence in adults parenting.

Edinburgh: Employment support for parents: 9 new projects started in 2021 focussing on parents’ specific employment needs and most include welfare rights. They range from the **DataKirk** programme, supporting parents from an ethnic minority to achieve careers in data to WorkSpace, working with parents in South-West Edinburgh to achieve their employment goals.

Engaging with Employers

The difficulty of engaging with employers around job opportunities and progression for employees was also cited as a barriers. One lead specified

“A lack of suitable, flexible and family friendly opportunities, particularly for parents with disabled children or children with additional support needs.”

Local partners shared some of the approaches they have taken which include

“Targeting entry level low paying employers and those with precarious contracts etc, utilising partner knowledge (FSB, Business Gateway etc) and targeting small businesses through Facebook and google searches”

The limited powers of local partners to influence employer behaviour was also raised.

“Employer engagement, fair work and flexibility needs to be driven by employers and SG policy, we work well with employers to support opportunities, however there are varying levels of commitment. E.G. Employers providing childcare as a cost effective alternative, more flexible working hours and place of work etc.”

It was highlighted that many Local Employability leads are participating in the Timewise flexible work programmes and toolkits have been developed to help change employer practices and support a more inclusive and diverse approach.

However, some also highlighted that current labour shortages could help convince employers of the needs of potential employees.

“This is an ideal time to engage with employers due to current labour shortages, about how to attract parents to work in these job roles. We need to be working together to provide suggestions to employers e.g. Orkney have high levels of seasonal jobs, could these be annualised to support consistency in salary and UC top up payments etc.”

The role of local partners as employers and procurers was also raised. Participants were keen to hear ideas as to how local authorities, health boards and wider partners could create jobs and promote opportunities for those in the priority groups. One respondent highlighted,

“ELC funding could be subject to PESF interventions to ensure parents get access to ELC jobs.”

“We also need to be aware of the difficult situation many employers are in. They are struggling and unstable as a result of COVID. We need those businesses to thrive.”

It was noted that COSLA Leaders have agreed to provide supported pathways into local job opportunities for priority groups and work is ongoing locally and nationally to progress opportunities working with HR and Procurement colleagues as well as Community Planning Partners.

The Co-production of Employability Services

Some participants highlighted the need to ensure people with lived experience were involved in the design and development of services, calling for,

“Community engagement & co-design (will be commissioned moving forward)”

“Genuine and effective community engagement, two way coms and evidence of impact e.g. co-design.”

The lack of resource to support this approach and ‘consultation fatigue’ on the part of ‘service users’ was also raised,

“Challenges: communities feeling engagement survey fatigue, multiple requests from various services re information input.”

Again, numerous examples of interesting practice were identified through the year 3 Local Child Poverty Action Reports.

Fife: The voice of lived experience has been key in developing new provision in Fife, therefore involving people who use services, frontline staff and employers in service planning, design and delivery is crucial to developing services which are responsive and relevant. This included targeted efforts to engage with people affected under the Equalities Act (Scotland) 2010. Over 120 individuals and organisations participated in collaborative conversations between June and September 2020 to inform the areas of focus for the challenge fund. The panel recommended the approval of six projects to form the No One Left Behind Programme.

It was noted that service user involvement is a key element of NOLB through which the Parental Employment Support is being delivered a recently published customer charter, service standards framework and impending service user toolkit will help support improvements in this area.

Funding

Consistent, well-planned funding for employability and wider services was raised repeatedly at the event.

“Multi annual funding would provide more job security for the people that are providing PEF support to parents in our area.”

“Continuity and consistency of funding is needed to develop high quality services”

“There are too many different funding streams targeting similar target groups. Individuals can be eligible for a number of different programmes/funds, so we are almost competing against ourselves/each other. Not always clear how many funding streams individuals can be on at once.”

The issue of funding wider work to tackle child poverty (beyond employability and related services) was also raised,

“There were a lot of comments at the session about extra resource for employability - to date there is limited funding to deliver Child Poverty and we need to explore that in Angus.”

It was noted that discussions on funding continuity, simplification and flexibilities were ongoing but there was already agreement to a person centred, needs led approach which would enable the integrated local support to improve sustainable outcomes and that Local Partnerships and service users would be actively involved in co-designing local solutions.

For more information please contact the National Coordinator for Local Child Poverty Action Reports Hanna.mcculloch@improvementservice.org.uk

Appendix 1 Word Cloud –What would have the biggest positive impact on parental employability in your area?

