



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Research on Poverty in Belfast
Date:	12 November 2008
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern Director of Development ext. 3470
Contact Officer:	Anne-Marie Campbell Policy & Research Manager ext. 3620 Jelena Buick Policy & Research Officer ext. 3229

Relevant Background Information

Poverty seems the most pertinent issue affecting Northern Ireland with Belfast in particular affected. It for example has 8 of the 10 worst wards in Northern Ireland and 48% of population in Belfast Local Government District live within the most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) in Northern Ireland.

Child poverty, in particular, not only has great human costs for the families and children affected, but also imposes a large cost on taxpayers and reduces the UK's economic potential. New research estimates that child poverty costs £25 billion each year in costs to the Exchequer (borne by tax payers) and reduced GDP. Also, the latest research from Joseph Rowntree Foundations found that child poverty represents 71% of social services spend across the UK.

Although the Council does not have legislative requirements to alleviate poverty, it has civic responsibilities and thus needs to provide some support to citizens in eradicating poverty. As a starting point, the Development Department commissioned Dr Michael Morrissey to undertake research on poverty in Belfast with the three main aims:

- To assess the level of poverty in Belfast by comparison with other places;
- To identify ways in which the council could help eradicate poverty within the city;
- To recommend a set of anti-poverty initiatives the Council could promote in the short and medium term.

This piece of work is now finalised and the Appendix 1 contains a summary version. If they wish, Members can obtain a full version of this document.

Key Issues

As part of this study Dr Michael Morrissey has devised a new way of measuring poverty based on the:

- i) European standard of income measurement (households with less than 60% of the median household income); and
- ii) Poverty risk analysis which answers the 'who' question – which types of households are most likely to be in poverty?

Dr Morrissey's report identifies three main categories of households at the highest risk of poverty:

- Young and elderly;
- Workless; and
- Lone parent.

The report gives much insight and indicates potential implications for the work of the Council.

Based on the findings of this report and considering the importance and urgency of the poverty issue in Belfast, it is proposed to devise an Anti-Poverty Policy for Council.

As part of this process we propose to hold a half a day session, inviting all the Council Members, Chief Officers and the key external experts (such as Dr Morrissey) on 30th January 09 in Waterfront Hall, Green Room. The workshop will commence at 9.30am with a view to finish by 13.30 followed by lunch. A detailed agenda will be sent to Members in due course.

Resource Implications

Financial

Costs for the Anti-poverty session and workshop are covered in the current budget.

Recommendations

The Committee members are asked to:

- Note the content of this report;
- Agree on proposals for devising anti-poverty policy for the Council; and
- Participate at the workshop to on the Council's Anti-Poverty Policy which will take place on 30th January in Waterfront Hall

Documents Attached

Summary report of Poverty in Belfast, by Michael Morrissey.