

Local child and family poverty strategies – GMPA Briefing

Background

The Child Poverty Act (2010) placed a requirement on local authorities and ‘delivery partners’ in England to carry out child poverty needs assessments and develop child poverty strategies.

This gave impetus to local authorities and key agencies such as health to work together to tackle child poverty. Whilst many of the main drivers of child poverty lie with central government, joint working at a local level allowed each area to identify action that could be taken in important areas such as parental employment, housing support, childcare and early years provision and access to services.

The Government scrapped the requirement to carry out needs assessments and develop local child poverty strategies in 2016. Despite this, some areas continue to have strategies in place.

This short briefing makes the case for local child and family poverty strategies, looks at the current state of the child poverty agenda and details a new resource developed by Greater Manchester Poverty Action (GMPA) that maps local approaches to tackling poverty.

GMPA is committed to carrying out further work on local poverty strategies in 2019.

The need for local child and family poverty strategiesⁱ

Many of the most important decisions made affecting child poverty and children's lives are made at a local level. The collapse of this agenda at a UK government level and projected increases in child poverty over the coming yearsⁱⁱ means that action at a local level is more important than ever. Local action on child and family poverty can be taken in the following policy areas:

- Parental employment
- Educational outcomes and experiences
- Child health
- Economic development and regeneration
- Debt and financial advice and support
- Housing support
- Local elements of the welfare system (e.g. discretionary housing payments, council tax support and local welfare assistance schemes)
- Youth services
- Early years and childcare provision.

The wide-ranging nature of the areas of policy that can be affected locally means that a strategic approach is required to ensure buy-in across all local authority departments and by key stakeholders. An effective strategy can ensure that all policies consider their ‘poverty impact’ and that positive measures in one policy area are not counteracted by negative measures in another.

An effective local child and family poverty strategy can ensure that all stakeholders, including those in the VCSE sector, are invested in a local mission to tackle child and family poverty with clear roles identified. A report by Child Poverty Action Group found that local authorities that were most heavily invested in the issue of child poverty were ones where the agenda had been taken up across the local authority and there was significant high level ‘buy in’ⁱⁱⁱ.

The current state of the child poverty agenda

The Child Poverty Act (2010) was repealed in 2016. Therefore, the main elements of central government's approach to tackling child poverty (targets to reduce child poverty to certain levels by 2020, the development of three yearly national child poverty strategies and establishing a Child Poverty Commission) are no longer in place.

Despite this, some local areas are maintaining a strategic focus on tackling child and family poverty. A number of local authorities have been working with partners to develop and refresh local strategies and consider how their approach to poverty sits in relation to other strategic agendas such as economic development and health. In Greater Manchester, Bury, Manchester and Salford councils are among those who have published updated anti-poverty strategies in the last 12 months.

This doesn't mean that the abandonment of this agenda by central government is without consequence. The lack of a central government child poverty strategy means that there is a failure to assess the impact of policies on poverty and, even when measures such as increases in the statutory minimum wage (or 'National Living Wage') or increases in childcare support are introduced, any positive impact on poverty is more than offset by negative policies in other areas (e.g. cuts to working age benefits and tax credits).

One other consequence of the collapse of the child poverty agenda at a UK level has been the creation of a vacuum in which there is a lack of support or direction provided to English local authorities and their partners as to how they can tackle child and family poverty locally. Therefore, there is considerable divergence in the strategic approach being taken to tackling child and family poverty between local areas. Whilst it can be argued individual areas are well placed to develop tailored responses to poverty in their area, it is important that local poverty strategies capture all those policy areas that are within the gift of local authorities and partners and that strategies are cross-cutting and have high level buy-in.

Devolution to city regions may present an opportunity to fill the vacuum created by central government. The fact that Scottish Government (see text box below) (and to a lesser extent the Welsh Government) is forging its own path should act as a catalyst for discussions at a city region level in England (including in Greater Manchester) as to whether metro mayors can play a role in both providing guidance on the scope of local strategies and in developing strategies that sit at a city regional level.

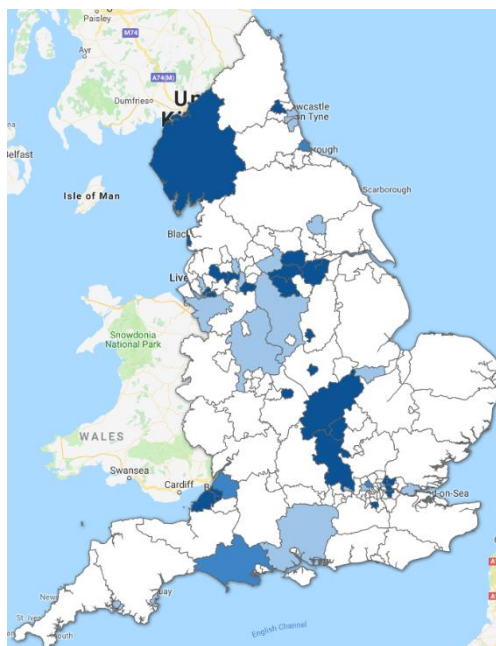
In Greater Manchester the integration of health and social care creates an opportunity to consider how services can best meet the needs of those experiencing poverty and whether a preventative approach to poverty can positively contribute to the public health agenda and ease pressure on health and social care budgets.

Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017

The Scottish Government passed its own Child Poverty Act in 2017. The Act introduces child poverty reduction targets to be met by 2030 and places a requirement on each local authority and relevant Health Board to jointly prepare and publish a local child poverty action report. A local child poverty action report must describe any measures that the local authority and Health Board is taking to address child poverty.

Mapping local child and family poverty strategies

GMPA has developed a new tool to support local authorities and other stakeholders to identify approaches to the development of local child and family poverty strategies. This can help fill the vacuum created by the lack of guidance or support from central government. We are particularly keen to work with each of the ten Greater Manchester local authorities (and their partners). GMPA wants to ensure that each area in Greater Manchester has a robust and effective approach to tackling child and family poverty in place and to support the sharing of best practice across the city region.



To date GMPA has mapped anti-poverty strategies in 49 top-tier local authority areas in England - 24 of the 49 have a child or family poverty strategy in place (for example Manchester) and the remaining 25 incorporate a focus on child and family poverty within a broader strategy (for example Salford) or set of strategies (for example Wigan). Colour coding is used to differentiate these areas.

Where possible the map provides a link to the relevant strategy or set of strategies.

The map can be accessed at:

<https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/local-child-poverty-strategies/>

The map will be updated with other areas in December 2018.

Figure 1: Mapping local child and family poverty strategies in England

About GMPA

GMPA is a not-for-profit organisation based in Greater Manchester that works to address poverty across the city region. We convene and network organisations from across the public, private and VCSE sectors to foster collaboration and innovation and to maximise the impact of efforts to address hardship and deprivation across Greater Manchester. We carry out research and we campaign for changes in policy both locally and nationally so that the structural and systematic causes of poverty are addressed.

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ⁱ Given that a number of the ways in which child poverty can be addressed relates to boosting parental income and supporting household finances, GMPA believes it is helpful to refer to 'child and family poverty' rather than simply 'child poverty'. As such we refer to 'child and family poverty strategies' throughout this briefing.

ⁱⁱ See: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/research/76>

ⁱⁱⁱ See: CPAG (2012) *The implementation of the Child Poverty Act: examining Child Poverty Strategies in London Local Authorities*