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| <b>Committee:</b><br>Cabinet  | <b>Date:</b><br>6 May 2009 | <b>Classification:</b><br>Unrestricted                                       | <b>Report No:</b> | <b>Agenda Item:</b> |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Corporate Director Children's Services<br><br><b>Originating officer(s)</b><br>Layla Richards - Service Manager<br>Partnerships and Equality |                            | <b>Title:</b><br>Child Poverty Strategy<br><br><b>Wards Affected:</b><br>All |                   |                     |

## 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents Tower Hamlets' first child poverty strategy reflecting the importance attached to tackling child poverty in the Community Plan and our new three year Children and Young People's Plan. The strategy and action plan can be found at [Appendix 1](#).
- 1.2 In Tower Hamlets child poverty is everyone's business and it can only really be tackled through actively engaging key partners. The development of the cross-cutting strategy and action plan has therefore taken place with a range of services across the Council and with partner agencies in the Tower Hamlets Partnership.
- 1.3 There has been a particular focus on the strategy's development through the Achieve Economic Wellbeing theme group of the Children and Families Trust (formerly known as the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Group). This group brings together partners from a range of organisations and will be responsible for monitoring progress against the strategy. This group is accountable to the Children and Families Trust, one of the borough's five Community Plan Delivery Groups (CPDGs).

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- 2.1 Agree the Child Poverty Strategy attached at Appendix 1.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 There is commitment - both nationally and locally – to preventing and tackling child poverty and there are a number of things happening at national, regional and local level to help put an end to child poverty.
- 3.2 Nationally, the government has set targets for halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020. The government has also recently consulted on a Child Poverty Bill, which it is expected will be passed in summer 2009, and will cement in legislation the government's commitment to eradicate child poverty.
- 3.3 Reflecting national commitment to this agenda, preventing and tackling child poverty was selected as a theme for the latest round of the Beacon Scheme. Tower Hamlets was one of three local authorities across the country to be awarded Beacon status for this theme.
- 3.4 At a regional level, the London Child Poverty Commission has been introduced and the Child Poverty Pledge launched to reduce levels of child poverty in London.
- 3.5 Locally, we have made tackling child poverty everyone's business. A commitment has been made through the Community Plan and aspiration of One Tower Hamlets to reduce the inequalities and poverty that exist within the borough. We have also included the national indicator for child poverty in our Local Area Agreement (LAA).
- 3.6 Our new three year Children and Young People's Plan has identified tackling child poverty as one of its three cross-cutting priorities and interventions which will both tackle and mitigate the effects of child poverty cut across the Every Child Matters themes of the plan.
- 3.7 Alongside this there is cross-party commitment amongst Tower Hamlets' Elected Members and for the past six months Scrutiny Members have been undertaking a review to explore how they can contribute to the achievement of One Tower Hamlets by focusing on the issue of child poverty.

### **4. BODY OF REPORT**

- 4.1 Tower Hamlets has the highest levels of child poverty in the country according to a number of measures. According to latest available figures, over 66% of children in Tower Hamlets live in families earning less than 60% of the national median income – this is national indicator measurement for child poverty.
- 4.2 The recent Beacon award is recognition of the considerable progress made to date in both breaking the cycle of deprivation and mitigating the effects of poverty for children and families. The award presents an exciting opportunity to

work alongside the two other Beacons, Cornwall and Newcastle, to learn from their approaches and to work closely with government, in particular the joint Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Child Poverty Unit.

### *Developing the strategy*

- 4.3 The strategy and actions have been developed with cross-Directorate and partner input. The Achieve Economic Wellbeing theme group of the Children and Families Trust has been particularly involved in its development.
- 4.4 The process of developing the strategy has enabled us to review the interventions already in place and where we should be doing more to tackle child poverty.
- 4.5 We have developed a strategic framework for thinking about child poverty. It is structured around four key priorities:
  - Removing barriers to work
  - Developing pathways to success
  - Breaking the cycle of poverty
  - Mitigating the effects of poverty
- 4.6 This framework has been helpful for making child poverty everyone's business and identifying the range of factors that impact on and contribute to tackling child poverty.
- 4.7 The development of the strategy has taken place alongside a six month Scrutiny Review led by the One Tower Hamlets Scrutiny Lead. The strategy responds to relevant recommendations from the Review.
- 4.8 The strategy does not attempt to cover everything that we will do to tackle child poverty, but instead focuses on the new activities, building on existing provision, where we feel the Partnership can have the most impact. It also recognises that there is only so much we can do locally and that government can play a crucial role in preventing and tackling child poverty.
- 4.9 A number of the activities derive from the successful Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) proposals. The objective of WNF is to tackle worklessness and low levels of skills and enterprise in the most deprived areas. Interventions put forward for funding, particularly those in the *Family Focused Engagement* programme stream, will therefore have a direct impact on reducing child poverty.

### *Delivering the strategy and monitoring progress*

- 4.10 Child poverty is a cross-cutting issue and tackling it requires a concerted partnership approach. The strategy will therefore be delivered through the framework of the Tower Hamlets Partnership.
- 4.11 Overall accountability for our LAA child poverty targets and our child poverty strategy sit with our Children and Families Trust. However, it will be the Achieve Economic Wellbeing theme group, which brings together partners from a range of agencies including the Council, Tower Hamlets College, our Education Business Partnership and the Learning and Skills Council, which will be responsible for monitoring and reviewing progress against the strategy.
- 4.12 While overall accountability sits with the Children and Families Trust, the Prosperous Community CPDG clearly plays a key role in this agenda – this group is responsible for the LAA targets around employment and worklessness.

### *Launching the strategy*

- 4.13 The strategy will be launched in summer 2009. In addition, the launch campaign of the new Children and Young People's Plan will focus on tackling child poverty as one of its cross-cutting themes.

## **5. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

- 5.1 The new Strategy has no direct financial implications for Children's Services revenue or capital budgets for 2009-10 or future years. The priorities set out in therein will be used to inform the allocation of existing resources in future years.
- 5.2 A number of the activities are also being funded through the Working Neighbourhoods, specifically £1.4m for the 'Family Focused Engagement' programme stream. This programme is fully funded for an 18 month period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009.

## **6. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)**

- 6.1 Cabinet is asked to agree the Child Poverty Strategy in Appendix 1.
- 6.2 The Council is subject to a duty under the Children Act 2004 to ensure that every child, whatever their background or circumstances has the support they need to be safe. This may be viewed as supporting elements of the strategy.
- 6.3 More generally, however, the Council is empowered under section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000, to do anything which it considers is likely to promote the social, economic or environmental well being of Tower Hamlets (the well being power). The power may be exercised in relation to, or for the benefit of: (a) the whole or any part of Tower Hamlets; or (b) all or any persons resident in Tower

Hamlets. In exercising the power, regard must be had to the Community Plan. The report draws attention to the links between the strategy and the Community Plan and it is open to members to conclude that the well being power supports the making of the strategy.

## **7. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS**

### *Reduce inequalities*

- 7.1 The child poverty strategy specifically addresses inequality and the needs of children and families living in and experiencing poverty. An equalities screening exercise of the strategy has been undertaken and plans made for a full equalities impact assessment to be undertaken once the strategy is in place.

### *Ensuring community cohesion*

- 7.2 This objective of this strategy is to tackle child poverty and inequality which can undermine cohesion. Specifically, it contains actions to ensure young people have equal access to cultural and leisure opportunities and to narrowing the gap in educational attainment and ensuring young people from low income backgrounds access higher education.

## **8. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT**

- 8.1 There are no specific implications in the child poverty strategy in relation to the environment.

## **9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The Council has signed up to an LAA target to reduce child poverty and this strategy contributes to meeting that target. The strategy's success in meeting this target is dependent on robust performance and risk management.
- 9.2 Our action plan will be managed through the Council's performance and risk management framework to ensure that progress is tracked and remedial action put in place to address any risks.

## **10. EFFICIENCY STATEMENT**

- 10.1 As part of the development of the strategy through the Achieve Economic Wellbeing theme group we are starting to measure to impact of existing actions to tackle child poverty to help us better understand which are making the most difference and where resources need to be prioritised.

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**Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)**

## List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report

| Brief description of “back ground papers” | Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection. |
|---|---|
| <b>NONE</b>                               |   |

### 11. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Child Poverty Strategy