

Comments from Oxfordshire County Council Themed Debate on Breaking the Cycle of Deprivation

This paper has been included for information.

Introduction

1. The County Council holds a themed debate at each full Council meeting, with each political group taking turns to select a topic. On 3 November, the debate was on breaking the cycle of deprivation and was sponsored by the official Opposition (Liberal-Democrats). As this work is being taken forward in partnership, the results of the debate have been circulated to members at this meeting for information.
2. The debate focused on the following areas:
 - Unemployment
 - Hidden deprivation
 - Health inequalities
 - Narrowing the Gap
3. The Partnership is asked to note the comments by councillors from Oxfordshire County Council and consider any implications for partnership working around breaking the cycle of deprivation. The comments are those made by Councillors that were recorded by officers during the debate.

Main Issues Arising in the Debate on 3 November

Unemployment

Young People

- Need more positive title for this group of young people than NEETS (Not in Education, Employment or Training)
- Lack of affordable social housing in pockets of deprivation and it is difficult for young people to set up home on their own
- For 16-18 year-old NEETs, average level of unemployment was 7.1% in August (more than 10% of this group were in Banbury and Cowley/Iffley, nearly as many were in Didcot and almost 15% were in south-east Oxford). Within those figures, the vulnerable groups are not faring well with young people leaving care at 60%, young offenders at 70% and teenage mothers at 87%.
- Employers say cannot offer apprenticeships as young people lack basic skills.
- UK has more young people in custody than other countries. When they are released from custody they find it difficult to get work. In

families where fathers have convictions, their sons are more likely to have convictions

- Focus on opportunities the public sector (in particular the County Council) can create for young people e.g. employment for young people leaving care, more training/apprenticeships e.g. in caring
- NEETS still face problems when they are over 18
- Need facilities for young people e.g. keeping youth clubs operating

General

- People other than young people also need jobs
- People should be encouraged to claim all benefits to which they are entitled
- Local voluntary groups can achieve more than statutory organisations and grants to the former should be protected
- Work of agencies needs to be better co-ordinated.
- Lack of ambition from the political leadership
- Poor housing may lead to low educational attainment to low skills to unemployment
- Raise aspirations and help access to employment
- UK only G7 country still in recession and the recession may get worse and continue for years
- Banbury has lost manufacturing jobs and needs similar types of employment for those who lost their jobs
- Some families may have three generations' experience of unemployment
- Different solutions may be needed for different local areas
- Invest in skills, housing and seek to attract investment into the County
- Seek to insulate 1,000 homes in Oxfordshire rather than subsidise car drivers
- Back to Work action group and Improving Education output group have no funding for projects
- Tackle deprivation by withdrawing funding from some areas and spending in deprived areas

Hidden Deprivation

Young People

- Not having a car impacts on the employment and social life of young people.
- Not everybody goes to university or achieves 'A' levels – need other jobs e.g. in caring, serving in shops
- The Princes Trust seeks to encourage children to stay on at school and has bought bicycles/mopeds to enable children to see their friends.
- A young unemployed person may be the only young person in their village in the daytime.
- In 2002, no child at Cherwell School living on the Cutteslowe Estate continued their education at the school post 16. A Mentoring Scheme was introduced. Visits were made to the 67 families to talk about

continuing at school and 19 of these children were persuaded to continue at school. The scheme did not require much funding.

- In some rural areas, people need their own transport as there is no public transport.

Older People

- Elderly people may see few people and may rely on the TV for company.
- Elderly people may have to rely on one weekly bus service to get to medical appointments.

Rural Areas

- In rural areas, it can be difficult to access services e.g. children centres, mobile libraries
- Encourage villages to work together on community transport schemes
- New government initiatives introduced to tackle deprivation rarely get to rural areas.
- Marie Biston (the young person who spoke at the meeting) asked about free transport post 16 to educational establishments; it is a tax on learning for children in rural areas.

General Issues

- Concerned that Home Start support may be withdrawn as some families need services taken to them
- Green gyms have been set up in some areas to encourage well-being.

Health Inequalities

Funding

- Oxfordshire has lowest funding per capita in the country.
- Public health is the poor relation and needs more funding
- EU regional policies funding is available to tackle health inequalities

General Issues

- All major health services are in Oxford and as a consequence some people in the county live a long way from an acute hospital/JR Hospital.
- Director of Public Health is our “conscience” – breaking the cycle of deprivation is one of his objectives.
- Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee is looking at equity of access/outcomes. The Centre for Public Scrutiny has resources for a beacon authority to combat health inequalities and Oxfordshire is considering bidding for resources.
- Rising number of over 50s and so need to target services accordingly.
- Carers can face economic hardship as some have to give up work to be carers

Narrowing the Gap

Education

- Lower educational attainment levels by persistent absentees from schools and pupils with behavioural and social disorders
- Better nutrition to improve concentration and learning – hence the importance of breakfast clubs
- Physical health games/PE to improve well-being of pupils
- School curriculum needs to be stimulating
- Short-term target should be to improve discipline at home and school
- Need investment in schools as a basic education is needed by all
- Children learn social skills in children centres/nursery schools

General Issues

- Long-term target should be to raise aspirations
- Concern that most recommendations of the scrutiny review on social inclusion have not been implemented
- Difficult to build up social capital in large urban centres enabling communities to do things for themselves.
- Communities should all be part of raising children
- Support marriage/family values
- Many organisations may be involved in helping a family but one main contact person might be better

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