

local authority progress in tackling child poverty

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Executive summary

Introduction

In March 2010 the Child Poverty Bill gained Royal Assent with cross-party support. The ensuing *Child Poverty Act* (England and Wales Statutes, 2010) placed a legal obligation on government to end child poverty in the UK by 2020. It also placed new duties on devolved administrations and local government to tackle child poverty.

The Local Government Group (LG Group) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake research to assess local authorities' (LAs) progress in meeting these new duties. Specifically, the research assesses the extent to which LAs are progressing with the requirement to complete a local needs assessment and a joint local child poverty strategy. This report presents the key findings from in-depth telephone interviews with 43 child poverty partnership members across nine case-study areas, conducted between January and March 2011.

The status of child poverty work

The eradication of child poverty is generally considered to be a high priority across the case-study areas, with interviewees in only one partnership reporting that it is low on the LA's agenda. Areas where child poverty work has a particularly high status tend to be characterised by:

- high levels of deprivation
- a high level of strategic understanding and commitment to tackling child poverty
- a child poverty partnership that is governed by or is a sub-group of an existing executive body within the LA
- a view of child poverty as a cross-cutting theme across the LA area

- strong support from LA elected members, with cabinet representatives directly involved in the child poverty partnership's work.

Most interviewees are concerned that the lack of statutory and prescriptive guidance from government weakens LAs' efforts to tackle child poverty. In the main, partnerships would appreciate greater direction and support from government, and some form of statutory guidance for LAs on tackling child poverty. They are also concerned that current public-sector budget reductions may impact upon the status of their child poverty work in the future.

Collaborative approaches to tackling child poverty

Most partnerships are well developed and the interviewees consider them to have the key ingredients for successful collaboration:

- a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities
- a shared commitment to a common goal
- a focus on outcomes for children and families
- good leadership
- the right mix of people in the partnership.

All the partnerships include representatives from LA services, such as children's services, adult services, social care and health, transport and housing. They also include representatives from public health, JobCentre Plus and the voluntary and community sector (VCS). Apart from a lack of private-sector involvement, interviewees generally feel that the right organisations are represented in their partnerships.

Very few partnerships have been able to pool or align their funds, and feel they need more guidance and a top-level directive in order to achieve this. Some think that aligning resources is a more realistic approach.

Partnerships have clear views on the guidance and support they need to drive their work forward, covering both strategic and practical support at national, regional, local and community levels. Such support includes: ongoing help from external advisors (for example, sector specialists from the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO)), guidance on pooling budgets, evidence of business cases and of value for money and support to keep child poverty high on the agenda as LA services are reconfigured.

Identifying the problem and framing the response

Most partnerships have already completed a child poverty needs assessment (CPNA), although they have experienced a number of challenges in doing so. The main challenge relates to accessing and sharing appropriate data due to the time lag that often occurs between nationally produced data being collated and published. It can also be difficult for LAs to receive or share locality, or super-output-level, data due to data protection restrictions.

Partnerships have generally made a relatively smooth transition from assessment to strategy, and the majority expect to publish their strategies between March and April 2011. They identify a number of challenges including deciding priorities for action and committing to these in a period of economic uncertainty, service reconfiguration, job losses, and keeping the momentum going in the absence of statutory central guidance. Nevertheless, there are factors that have helped partnerships to develop their strategies:

- the same people being involved at both the assessment and strategy stages
- viewing the CPNA as a forerunner to the strategy
- making links between needs and actions
- keeping both documents live and under review.

The Child Poverty Act requires LAs to consult children and parents (and the organisations working with or representing each) as they think appropriate. Generally, children and young people have not been involved in

strategic planning. However, some areas have successfully engaged young people through consultation or by using materials generated by young people to influence strategic developments.

Moving from strategy to action

Child poverty partners are concerned about how they will turn their strategic planning into effective action, and whether their strategies will have a positive impact on families and children. Their concerns relate to budget reductions and service cut backs; rising poverty rates due to the increasing cost of living; and the enormity of the task of overcoming structural and culturally ingrained poverty.

Many believe that partnerships can make a difference if they focus on direct intervention with families rather than macro-economic issues. Most partnerships are planning to tackle poverty, initially, in small and manageable ways by focusing on specific localities, families and groups. Only one LA area in our telephone interviews is planning a coordinated intervention project resulting specifically from their child poverty strategy. Others are using a range of pre-existing interventions based on four objectives: reducing unemployment, improving financial literacy, improving health and giving children the best start in life.

The main reasons given for progress in implementation relate to:

- the strength of local partnerships
- executive and cabinet 'buy-in'.
- well-developed CPNAs and timetables for implementation
- the leadership qualities of the child poverty lead
- the availability of centrally funded child poverty grants.

Recommendations for policy makers and local partnerships

Central government needs to do all it can to assuage the concerns of partnerships by making morale-boosting statements about the importance of child poverty work, providing concrete examples of how the Big Society will effectively continue the progress that has been made and giving assurances that central funding will remain in place through direct grants to LAs.

LAs can benefit from guidance on how to position their partnerships within the council structure to maximise impact. Suggestions from interviewees include sharing analyses and strategy documents with elected members and encouraging elected members or senior executive-level staff to chair partnership meetings. They also recommend that the child poverty lead has strong leadership qualities and influence across the whole LA area. Drawing senior staff from across the LA and partner organisations into the child poverty partnership is seen as key to maximising impact.

LAs currently need more support from central and local government on specific issues such as pooling and aligning budgets, evidence of 'what works' in tackling child poverty (business cases and value-for-money examples), ways to attract the private sector to contribute to local child poverty developments and strategies for encouraging inward investment into disadvantaged areas.

A number of 'tools' would help LAs and their partners to plan and act on their strategies. Interviewees suggest some level of central prescription, even if only at the level of minimum expected standards or statutory monitoring of progress. They would like to have accurate and timely national and local-level prevalence data, clear guidance on data protection legislation, advice on developing the CPNA into a strategy and advice on moving from strategy to implementation.

LAs and their partners need to be realistic about their child poverty outcome goals, and to recognise that there is much that they can do to mitigate the effects of poverty. Interviewees' suggestions for achieving this include: keeping interventions specific, family focused and manageable; 'child poverty-proofing' all LA strategic plans; self-monitoring and evaluation; and sharing good practice locally and regionally.

1 Introduction

On 25 March 2010, the Child Poverty Bill gained Royal Assent with cross-party support. The ensuing Child Poverty Act (England and Wales Statutes, 2010) places a legal obligation on current and future governments to end child poverty in the UK by 2020. It also places new duties on devolved administrations, LAs and their partners to work together to tackle child poverty. Specifically, Part 2 of the Act places three requirements on LAs and their partners.

- **Cooperate:** work with partner authorities named in the Act to reduce and mitigate the effects of child poverty in their local areas.
- **Understand needs:** prepare and publish a local CPNA that identifies key drivers of poverty that must be addressed.
- **Develop and deliver a strategy:** prepare a joint child poverty strategy for their local area, setting out the contribution that each partner authority will make.

Following Royal Assent the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) produced an informal consultation paper offering draft interim guidance about local duties on child poverty. This was superseded, in September 2010, by *A Guide to Part 2 of the Child Poverty Act 2010: Duties of Local Authorities and Other Bodies in England* (DfE, 2010). The new government also commissioned a report into child poverty, published as an Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances, led by Frank Field MP. This report (Field, 2010) makes two key recommendations.

- The development of an index of 'Life Chances Indicators', measuring the equality of life's outcomes for all children. This proposed index would complement traditionally used income-based measures of child poverty.

- The establishment of the first pillar in a new tripartite education system: the foundation years, from conception to five. This recommendation recognises that a child's early learning environment is critical in determining outcomes in later life.

This research is timely because it assesses the progress that LAs and their partners are making with regard to their new duties. The report considers all three areas of the duty: cooperation, understanding needs, and developing and delivering a strategy. It also considers responses to the Frank Field's *Review on Poverty and Life Chances* (Field, 2010). It looks at the reasons for progress and the key ingredients for success, and presents a number of case-study examples. Many of the ingredients, and examples of approach, may be transferrable to other LA areas. They can be useful to those commissioning services at a local level, and also to policy makers providing resources, support and guidance to LAs and their partners.

The research is based on in-depth telephone interviews undertaken with 43 strategic personnel between January and March 2011. Interviewees are spread across nine LAs and partner organisations. The nine case-study areas have been selected because they have evidence of good or promising progress. Further details of the case-study areas selected, and the criteria for selection, are presented in Appendix A.

All quotations displayed in *italics* throughout the report are from our interviewees. They have been anonymised to preserve confidentiality.

2 The status of child poverty work

Key findings

- Tackling child poverty is generally considered to be a high priority across the case-study LAs, with interviewees in only one child poverty partnership reporting that it is low on the agenda.
- The main factors influencing the status of child poverty work are the level of deprivation, the LA's demographics, and the current climate of budgetary constraints and restructuring within LAs.
- Where tackling child poverty is considered to be a high priority, the LA area tends to be characterised by: a high level of strategic commitment and understanding, a child poverty partnership that is based on existing structures within the LA, a view of child poverty as a cross-cutting theme across the LA area and strong elected member support.
- Most interviewees are concerned that the lack of statutory and prescriptive guidance from government weakens LAs' efforts to tackle child poverty. In the main, partnerships would appreciate greater direction and support from government, and most interviewees would welcome some form of statutory guidance.

This chapter focuses on the status of child poverty work within LAs, and examines how highly child poverty ranks on their agendas, and the factors influencing this. It also explores child poverty partnership members' views on the government's decision not to issue statutory and prescriptive guidance on tackling child poverty.

2.1 Profile of child poverty work within LAs

The eradication of child poverty is considered to be a high priority within the case-study areas. Interviewees in six of the LAs unanimously agree that it is high on the agenda of their LA area (with mixed views among interviewees in two other areas). In only one LA do the partnership members we spoke to believe that tackling child poverty is a low priority. Three main reasons are given for the status of child poverty work.

The scale of deprivation

Where child poverty work has a high status in an LA area, interviewees most commonly attribute this to high levels of deprivation (or high pockets of deprivation) and associated issues such as high unemployment, poor employment opportunities and health inequalities. Levels of deprivation are notably lower in the one LA where the interviewee felt child poverty work had a low status, and the two LA areas where interviewees' views were mixed. However, in another LA area with similarly low levels of deprivation, tackling child poverty has a high priority. This suggests that factors other than the scale of deprivation can be influential in determining the status of child poverty work.

The impact of budgetary constraints and LA restructuring

Budgetary constraints and LA restructuring are having an impact on the status of child poverty work. A low status may be linked to financial difficulties faced by LAs and any structural changes taking place. For example, one LA is described as being 'in such a state of flux that they have taken their eye away from the [child poverty] agenda'. In the LA area where child poverty has a low status, the partnership lead has been made redundant, and there will no longer be a lead dedicated to child poverty in that area.

Several interviewees, even though they believe child poverty work has a high priority in their LA areas, are concerned that spending reductions will lead to key members of their partnerships being made redundant. However, one partnership lead holds a different view. She believes that the current economic climate, levels of unemployment, impending policy reforms (for example, around welfare) and VAT increases have raised the profile of child poverty work. This is because of the recognised impact that these changes will have on the numbers of children living in poverty.

The demographic of the LA area

Interviewees, in the one LA area where child poverty work has a low status, explain that its priorities are weighted towards the older generation because of the area's demographic. They argue that children are 'not very high on the electoral agenda generally'. Theirs is a rural and Conservative-controlled LA with levels of deprivation in the lowest quartile nationally.

Where tackling child poverty is considered to be a high priority, LA areas tend to have the following distinctive characteristics.

A high level of strategic commitment and understanding

In six areas interviewees report a great deal of commitment to tackling child poverty within the local partnership, with 'buy-in' from senior staff at a strategic level. There is good awareness of the issues surrounding child poverty within their LAs and recognition of the need to address them.

In a few cases, cabinet members and staff at an executive level in both the LA and the partner organisations are directly involved in the child poverty partnership. This is particularly the case in LAs where levels of deprivation have historically been high, and where many services are already targeted at families in poverty. Such strategic commitment to tackling child poverty is evident in two LAs, which have included child poverty as a high priority in their recently refreshed Children and Young People's Plan. A further LA has child poverty as a theme in its city strategy, while another, which has recently restructured, has developed a new area focused on child poverty and

narrowing the gap within its Children and Families Directorate.

In contrast, where child poverty is considered to be a low priority, interviewees feel that, despite the efforts of their child poverty partnership, 'there is not such a commitment at the most senior level'. The partnership lead in one LA believes that child poverty is viewed by strategic staff within her LA as 'too big to tackle'.

A child poverty partnership based on existing structures

In some LAs, the partnership has been established as a new structure while, in others, it is a subgroup of an existing structure, usually an executive body such as the Children's Trust or the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) (see Section 3.2 for further details).

The status of child poverty work seems to be higher in those LAs where the partnership is a sub-group of an existing executive body, perhaps due to the strategic commitment associated with such an approach and the direct involvement of LA executives.

A view of child poverty as a cross-cutting theme

In most of the case-study areas, the child poverty partnership sits within children's services. However, in others, it is either a subgroup or reports directly to the LSP. Child poverty is often also viewed as a high priority across other LA departments and within partners such as health and economic development.

One interviewee, in an urban LA with high levels of deprivation, believes child poverty has been 'a major cross-cutting theme in everything we do for a number of years'. He gives the example of child poverty being a cross-cutting priority within the LA's Employment and Skills Strategic Framework.

Several interviewees recommend that the child poverty partnership is situated centrally within the LA, rather than in children's services. Alternatively, it should, at least, involve a wider range of partners (see Chapter 3 for further details on the nature of partnerships).

A cross-cutting approach has been achieved in one LA by making the strategic decision that child poverty is not 'marooned' solely as a children's services issue. Case study 1 shows how this has been achieved.

Case study 1: A local authority with child poverty as a cross-cutting theme

This urban and Labour-controlled LA in the Midlands has a child poverty rate in the top quartile nationally. The child poverty partnership is a subgroup of the children's trust, and involves a diverse range of partners covering both adult and children's services. It reports to the Children's Trust Board, the LSP executive, the cabinet and the health scrutiny panel. Consequently, it is very centrally and strategically situated within the LA.

Child poverty has been embraced as a 'hub issue', which the partnership lead describes as a useful means of joining up a range of 'apparently unconnected issues', such as youth justice and teenage pregnancy.

The child poverty partnership members we spoke to say this approach has helped to ensure a high level of senior strategic 'buy-in', both from within the LA, including cross-party commitment from elected members, and also from partner organisations.

2.2 Views of elected members

As might be expected, the level of elected member support for tackling child poverty is closely associated with the status given to such work within an LA. In areas where child poverty is perceived to be a high priority, elected members are also described as being supportive, with only one LA (a Conservative-controlled shire county with low levels of deprivation) being an exception. In this area, although partnership members report that child poverty is high on the LA's agenda, they generally feel that it is not a high priority among elected members due to the LA area being predominantly affluent.

Interviewees in the LA areas where child poverty has a high priority report 'commitment across the council' with good cross-party support. Elected members are said to be 'passionate' about eradicating child poverty. This is illustrated by a comment from one benefits welfare service manager: 'I have never had them [elected members] so involved and so interested in what I do.' This support is particularly evident amongst elected members who are directly involved in the work of the child poverty partnership. For example, in five LAs, the child poverty partnership includes cabinet representatives (as members or regular attendees to meetings in three partnerships, and as the partnership chair in two areas). This 'gives weight' to the work of the partnership and indicates 'buy-in from the top'. Elected members who hold portfolios linked to child poverty, such as children's services, health and housing, are particularly supportive and, in several cases, have championed the work of the child poverty partnership in the cabinet.

In contrast, the views of elected members are considered to be 'massively variable' in LA areas where there are mixed views on the status of child poverty, or where child poverty is perceived to be a low priority for the LA. Some elected members are reported to be very engaged in and supportive of the work of the child poverty partnership. However, those we spoke to do not consider such commitment to be widespread amongst all elected members. They describe 'pockets of understanding' among elected members with a few 'champions' of the child poverty partnership.

2.3 Views on non-prescriptive, statutory guidance for LAs and their partners

There is general agreement across eight of the nine case-study areas that the decision not to issue prescriptive and statutory guidance for LAs is problematic and could have a 'detrimental effect' on their progress. Most partnership members predict that the child poverty agenda will become a lower priority for LAs, and will 'go onto the back burner', particularly at a time when LAs are experiencing spending reductions and are having to make 'tough choices' about their priorities. There does not appear to be any relationship between such concerns and the level of deprivation in the LA area, or the priority given to tackling child poverty within the LA.

Partnership members are particularly anxious about the impact of not having ring-fenced funding for child poverty. They are concerned that, without statutory guidance, resources within the LA will be redirected away from tackling child poverty. Moreover, interviewees feel that the lack of statutory guidance demonstrates a lack of commitment from government to eradicating child poverty. This, in turn, may impact on an LA's commitment to the agenda:

My fear is that unless organisations are compelled [to work together to tackle child poverty], they will retreat into their own silos and only do their core business.

They [government] clearly don't care for the issue [...]. What's measured is what happens [...]. If they don't measure what local authorities are doing, it won't happen.

Some members of local child poverty partnerships also indicate that the lack of prescriptive guidance has made it 'more of a challenge' for them to develop and implement their child poverty work. For example, one partnership was unclear what information should be included in its CPNA, and would have welcomed clearer guidance on this. Others fear that, without a statutory duty to cooperate, it will become more difficult to engage partners in the future. Consequently, partners are concerned that LAs will adopt different approaches to tackling child poverty, of varying quality and effectiveness, and that action against child poverty will become a 'postcode lottery'.

Interviewees that welcome the lack of prescriptive guidance, or recognise the advantages of this approach (even if they do not believe it is the correct one), appreciate the flexibility and freedom that this gives LAs to respond to local needs and determine their priorities at a local level. A minority of interviewees,

most commonly the partnership leads, are very supportive of this lack of statutory guidance, and feel that the ability to tailor their child poverty work to the needs of their communities will lead to more positive outcomes. This view is summed up by one child poverty lead in an urban, Conservative-controlled LA, which has a child poverty rate in the second lowest quartile nationally:

There should be sufficient intelligence within local authorities and partners to take responsibility around these areas. [Prescriptive guidance] would have hampered creativity and innovation [...]. Local authorities need flexibility to adapt to local needs and trends.

In the main, LAs would welcome greater direction and support from government with regards to the child poverty agenda, and most interviewees would appreciate some form of statutory guidance for LAs on tackling child poverty. Some interviewees believe that this should take a formal approach, for example, a legislative framework with set targets. They would welcome greater monitoring of how LAs are tackling child poverty, to ensure that they are 'scrutinised and challenged'.

Others emphasise the need for balance. While they appreciate the flexibility and freedom that the current approach brings, they feel that some element of prescription from government would 'win hearts and minds more quickly', and ensure that the eradication of child poverty is kept a high priority within LAs. Interviewees in two partnerships, for example, suggest that some light-touch statutory guidance or minimum standards for LAs could lead to a more consistent approach nationally, and ensure that LAs continue to fulfil their duty to tackle child poverty.

3 Collaborative approaches to tackling child poverty

Key findings

- Most child poverty partnerships are well developed and consider they have the key ingredients for successful collaboration. These include a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, a shared commitment to a common goal, a focus on outcomes for children and families, good leadership and the right mix of people in the partnership.
- All the partnerships have representation from internal LA services, including children's services, adult services, social care and health, transport, housing, libraries, the children's trust and children's centres. They also have representation from public health, JobCentre Plus and the VCS.
- Very few partnerships have been able to pool or align their funds and feel they need more guidance and a top-level directive in order to achieve this. Some think that aligning resources is a more realistic approach.
- Partnerships have clear views on the guidance and support they need to drive their work forward. This includes ongoing support from external advisors, guidance on pooling budgets with evidence of business cases and support to keep child poverty high on the agenda as LA services are reconfigured.

This chapter looks at collaborative approaches to tackling child poverty. It discusses the essential ingredients for effective partnership working, the extent to which partnerships are demonstrating success, the challenges LAs and their partners face in pooling or aligning their budgets, and LAs' guidance and support needs.

3.1 Key ingredients for successful partnership working

There is a high degree of agreement among child poverty partners as to the key ingredients of successful collaboration.

Understanding of roles

There must be a clear understanding of everyone's roles, of what the impact of the work will be on partner organisations' agendas, and how they will benefit from the collaboration. One partnership makes its members' roles explicit by requiring them to bring a catalogue of their responsibilities to county-level meetings so they can be clear that they have the right people for the tasks. It is about being inclusive and making people feel they have a valuable contribution to make.

Shared commitment to a common goal

It is crucial to have a shared commitment to find mutually agreed outcomes, 'the common ground', and to work collectively to solve the problem of child poverty. It is important to 'develop a common view of what you are trying to achieve, and what each party can contribute' and to be 'prepared as individuals to look beyond your silo and see the added value of working together'. This entails working in more integrated ways, sharing information and resources, and planning together.

Focus on outcomes for children and families

It is essential to focus on tangible outcomes for children and families. It is important to identify partners' communalities, not their differences:

'You need to take your own organisational hats off and focus on the child's point of view.'

Good leadership

It is important to have someone at senior strategic level who can lead meetings effectively, broker relationships between partners, promote dialogue, and give coherence to the inputs of a range of different people. At the same time, some interviewees feel that leadership should be distributed across partnerships, with individual members leading on different aspects of the work, thus encouraging a 'lack of ego at an individual and organisational level'.

The right mix of people

It is important to have 'the right mix of people round the table, people who can make decisions, influence and inform'. Some members need to be close enough to practice to understand the issues, while others need to be senior managers with authority to make things happen in their respective organisations, and 'to translate things up to the strategic level'. It must be a partnership of 'the willing'. There is no room for 'sleeping partners'. The partnership must have a good rapport, open dialogue and positive attitudes. Partners must be 'generous with each other' and 'give time to develop relationships and understand exactly what people do'. As one child poverty lead remarks: 'Once the partnership develops you can be very honest – that's the sign of a healthy partnership.'

Practical factors

Additionally, a number of practical factors support collaborative working. These include having good lines of communication, both verbal and written, between partners. Meetings should be regular and 'engaging' in style and content. Members' time should be used wisely so that work is not duplicated. It is helpful if the membership is kept consistent (although there are fears for the consequences of job losses due to the current economic climate). It can also be productive if some members are working together in the same building.

3.2 Extent to which partnerships are demonstrating success

The research assessed the extent to which the nine LA areas possess the characteristics identified as key to successful collaboration. It looked at the nature of the partnerships, their stage of development and composition, and what makes for success.

What are the characteristics of the partnerships?

The majority of LA areas are using a new structure for their partnership, which has usually been formed as a subgroup of an existing structure such as the children's trust or the LSP. Many of the partners have also worked together before. Some LAs have a strategy group as well as working groups. For example, one LA has a strategic group with about 12 members at executive level and an operational group with about 20 members, commissioners and managers. The partnerships generally report to the children's trust or the LSP, although in one LA it is not clear where the partnership 'sits' because of considerable restructuring under a new administration.

How well developed are the partnerships?

In most LA areas, partnerships are either 'very well' or 'fairly well' developed. Interviewees ranked partnerships at approximately four points on a scale of one to five (five being the most successful) in terms of collaborative working. However, many would give their partnership a lower score for impact, because they have yet to succeed in alleviating poverty. Two partnerships award themselves a lower score of three for collaboration. In one case, this is because they need to engage a broader range of partners. In the other, it is because the partnership has focused on child poverty without addressing the influences of adult and family poverty. In general, partners fear that, with current spending reductions, the 'rapidly diminishing workforce is having a massive impact on capacity'.

Who is involved in the partnerships?

The composition of the partnerships varies according to their size and structure, but all have representation from internal LA services, including children's services, adult services, social care and health, transport, housing, libraries, the Children's Trust and children's centres, as well as from their district councils (in two-tier LAs), public health and JobCentre Plus. Elected members are represented on five partnerships (in two, as chair). Interviewees find this very useful because it gives them 'buy-in' from the top. Additionally, some have representatives from their LSP, emergency services (fire and police), the probation service, private housing, transport organisations, schools, Credit Union, Connexions, and black and minority ethnic groups

Most partnerships have representation from the VCS. Individual organisations involved include the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Coram, Barnardo's, Open Door and safer communities partnerships (collaborations between voluntary and statutory organisations). Some also include voluntary umbrella organisations, which enlist the support of individual voluntary groups in the LA. The majority think that the VCS is well represented. One LA, for example, 'has a history of sound, mature working with the third sector' and is generally 'very forward thinking in terms of joint partnerships'.

Who is not so commonly involved in the partnerships?

LAs generally struggle to involve local businesses in their partnerships. This is particularly the case where the public sector is a big employer (and where levels of child poverty are relatively high).

Additionally, children, young people and families tend not to be directly represented. LAs use existing links (for example, with children's centres or the youth service) to engage them. Some partners remark that direct representation on the partnership group would be 'tokenistic'.

Collaboration between district and county councils

Interviewees from the three shire counties speak of the enormous contribution their district councils make to partnership effectiveness. Case study 2 shows how early alignment of the two council tiers can positively influence progress at a local level.

Case study 2: Successful collaboration between district and county councils

This LA's partnership, The Child Poverty Reference Group, is characterised by close collaboration between the county council and its seven district councils. The Reference Group coordinates child poverty work at county level, but also presses for child poverty issues to be discussed and tackled at a local level. It has already completed a rigorous needs assessment and developed a framework for its strategy. Now it is asking its partner members: 'What will you do in your organisation? Who will you work with and where? How will you monitor the work?'

We spoke to senior managers in health, probation, children's centres, a district council and a district-level LSP. It is a significantly rural and Conservative-controlled LA in the Midlands, with a child poverty rate in the second lowest quartile nationally. They rate the success of their partnership at four points on a scale of one to five in terms of collaborative working. Whilst child poverty is not clearly apparent in county-level figures in this area, it is a big problem at district level, where pockets of poverty (in some cases, of up to 50 per cent) are exacerbated by rural isolation. This has shaped the group's approach to tackling local issues through the district councils with county council support.

What has contributed to successful collaboration?

First, there is well-developed collaborative working between the county and district councils. The partner members, many of whom have worked together before, have 'a mature approach'. Any potential tensions between the

county (which has statutory responsibility for the strategy) and the district councils (which have to implement it) have been deflected by aligning the two tiers early on and ensuring that all district councils are represented on the Child Poverty Reference Group. This approach has prevented the county council from being 'patronising' and the district councils from feeling 'junior'. The district councils have supported the county council by engaging early on with the voluntary and community sector at a local level. One district, for example, has secured funding for the CAB and local Credit Union to raise awareness of unlicensed money lending.

Second, the group has wide representation from different organisations, some of which would not normally work directly with children and young people (for example, housing and the emergency services). The partners think they have the right mix of people involved. Most are senior managers, but the district councils send officers, who have a pragmatic input to meetings and are well placed to implement the work.

Finally, partnership members are clear about their individual organisation's responsibilities and their own role in cascading information to colleagues in their various sectors. This increases their willingness to be involved ('buy-in') and their 'ability to see the whole picture rather than just one's own, to listen, and to identify what's shared'. Partners now understand the impact of the strategy on their own agenda and 'embrace' their individual responsibilities in the collective effort to tackle child poverty.

The partnership's strength lies in mutual respect and close involvement of the district councils. The group coordinator, who is Head of Service for the Health Partnership, has played a crucial role in getting 'measurable pledges' from the partners who, in turn, take a positive view that their work will make a difference, despite current uncertainty regarding funding.

Apart from a lack of private-sector involvement, interviewees feel the right organisations are represented in their partnerships, but they are open to

reviewing membership as need arises (which may be the case when they start to implement their strategies). Some already go outside of their partnership if they need particular expertise. One interviewee said representatives from transport and probation have been brought in as a direct consequence of the Child Poverty Act (DfE, 2010).

What makes the partnership successful?

Interviewees believe that, on the whole, they have 'what it takes' to achieve success.

- Responsibilities, in relation to child poverty, are clearly understood as is how their roles link together, and the need to contribute to the work 'without payback'.
- They are committed to making a difference to those living in poverty and have a collective understanding of the issues and the way to tackle them.
- The focus is on the bigger picture of what the work will achieve, rather than what they are going to do.
- Having an excellent lead person carries staff along, enthuses them and encourages them to have a 'let's have a go' mentality.
- Good structures and excellent communications 'up and down' are making the partnership successful.
- Having the right kind of people in the partnership, in terms of the organisations they represent and their level of seniority, means their members are people with 'leverage' who can make things happen at strategic level. At the same time, some sub-groups or working groups also include officers who can 'deal with the nitty-gritty'.
- They are successfully engaging the VCS, aligning district councils early on, and having high-level 'buy-in' from cabinet and senior colleagues.

Case study 3 outlines how one LA area has succeeded in developing a highly cohesive partnership, with top-level strategic support.

Case study 3: A successful approach to collaboration

This LA has a well-developed strategic Child Poverty Action Group, and its members (LA departments, statutory partners and the VCS) have several years' experience of working together. The group has completed an extensive CPNA and is now developing its existing child poverty strategy into a new strategy, with action points for 2011–14.

The people we spoke to hold senior positions in children's services, adult employment and skills, council cabinet and the CAB. There is a predominantly urban and Labour-controlled LA in London, with a child poverty rate in the highest quartile nationally. They spoke positively about the strength of their collaboration and its potential to contribute to alleviating poverty in their borough.

Members of the partnership believe that the collaboration is highly effective. On average, they give the partnership four points on a scale of one to five (with five being the most successful), but they acknowledge that there is always more that can be done. For example, they have not yet achieved budget pooling across member organisations and think that this is likely to become a greater challenge in the current economic climate, as different agencies become increasingly protective of their individual budgets.

What has contributed to successful collaboration?

There is 'high-level buy-in': the Child Poverty Action Group has huge support from elected members 'passionate' about eradicating poverty in the borough. Several sit on the LSP and the deputy leader, who chairs the Children's Trust, also sits on the action group. Child poverty is described as 'her baby', and it is this top-level support which has made it easier to see things through.

Significantly, the Child Poverty Action Group has evolved 'organically' from an existing strong collaboration of personalities who work well together. Partner members are confident that they

have the right number and mix of people involved, including both senior managers and officers. They have representatives from education (chair), CAB (vice chair), health, housing, the VCS and JobCentre Plus. The action group is a manageable size (about 12 members), but members draw in additional support if needed (for example, from the police).

Partnership members believe they have the right ingredients for working well together. These are: a common goal of narrowing the gap and eliminating inequality between children, a shared commitment to joined-up ways of working, respect for organisational and cultural differences, good communication within the group, which is a 'two-way process' and openness with each other, particularly when things are not working. Their shared commitment means they are 'driving things through' rather than just 'ticking boxes'.

They consider themselves to be very well led by the LA's child poverty lead. He holds productive meetings, encourages partners to participate fully, and makes sure the work is kept to time. The project is tightly managed and there is a clear child poverty delivery plan, in which partners are named for the different strands of the work, so that they can be held accountable.

The group is focused, well directed, and supported at the highest level in the LA. It has completed valuable work to improve the lives of children and young people. Those we spoke to said that the challenge now is to retain the strong infrastructure of the group as public finances are scaled back and services are reconfigured.

Cross-regional networks

Having discussed the nature and success of LA-level partnerships, we also asked interviewees for their views on establishing cross-regional networks, such as the Poverty and Life Chances Commissions suggested in the recent review of poverty and life chances by Frank Field MP (Field, 2010). In principle, interviewees agree with this concept, but express reservations about the practicalities of creating an 'unwieldy' superstructure,

which could inhibit concrete action at a local level. However, case study 4 demonstrates how one LA has embraced this approach.

Case study 4: An example of regional collaboration

This LA is working with five other LAs. They have an established history of working together through a multi-area agreement. This is a predominantly urban and Labour-controlled authority, and has a child poverty rate in the highest quartile nationally. The people we spoke to agree that tackling child poverty is a high priority, both within their LA area, and within the region as a whole, due to the scale of deprivation. The partnership lead believes that the regional approach that has been adopted has underpinned progress in its development work: 'We wouldn't have been so advanced without this model.'

All LAs in the regional collaboration have similar characteristics including high levels of deprivation and poor employment prospects. Thus, they share a common aspiration to tackle child poverty. Each LA has established its own partnership, focusing on the local-level context and priorities, but leads from each local partnership also meet on a monthly basis to share ideas and good practice on, for example, approaches to data collection and governance. The partnership lead believes that this is minimising duplication of effort within each LA. The regional collaboration has produced a 'city-wide skeleton', or template, for the strategy, which each member LA will adapt for its own area. A regional strategy will also be developed, which draws together the priorities of the region as a whole.

3.3 The challenge of pooling and aligning budgets

From 2011–2012 central government will be introducing a community budgets pilot, initially in 16 LAs, which will empower them to pool budgets across the public sector. In this context, we asked the LAs in

our research (none of which is taking part in the pilot) and their partners to tell us about their progress in pooling or aligning funds in their own areas. The majority have not yet achieved this and, as one interviewee acknowledges: 'It is something everyone aspires to, but does not realise.'

A few have made some small progress in this respect, but 'there has been more aligning than pooling [...]. People have been a little reticent to pool budgets'. One LA has 'started down that route' by pooling budgets with the health service to work on the problem of teenage pregnancy, but has now had to return to core funding. Another has aligned budgets in the children's trust to fund small initiatives collectively and has pooled budgets across health and social care. In a rural authority, there has been limited budget pooling between the county and district councils.

The barriers to pooling or aligning budgets

Interviewees identify a number of barriers to pooling or aligning their funds. They speak of the 'shocking timing' of the Child Poverty Act (DfE, 2010) and the duties it places on LAs working against severe budget cuts. As this interviewee remarks, it is dependent on 'having the budgets in the first place'. All organisations are anxious to preserve their own funds as funding diminishes. Partners speak of a 'silo mentality', where people are preoccupied with keeping control of their own organisations and concentrating resources on statutory, core functions. One rural partnership, for example, is concerned that funds will not be targeted at local issues if budgets are pooled across the county. Indeed, some partners are not in a position to pool budgets: 'There is so much governance and restraint around how budgets are spent.' For example, central government dictates the budget for JobCentre Plus (though it is due to have greater flexibility from April 2011), and VCS organisations do not have budgets to pool.

Finally, one interviewee points out that performance frameworks are still associated with an individual organisation rather than shared across all partners. There needs to be much greater freedom in what individual organisations are held to account for before they can consider pooling funds.

How can the barriers to budget pooling or aligning be overcome?

So far, very few partnerships have found ways to overcome the barriers to pooling or aligning funds. One has mapped current provision to explore where services are duplicated, which has helped with aligning budgets and redirecting resources. Another has given each partner a child poverty budget and encouraged them to align a similar or greater sum from their mainstream budgets with this, and so having 'an influence over mainstream budgets'. A third partnership has produced a very detailed CPNA, so that it can see exactly what the issues are (for example, accessing benefits and overcrowded housing) and focus shared resources on these.

Other partnerships think that organisations should agree where money needs to be spent, and should be clearer about desired outcomes when commissioning services. Some interviewees feel, however, that this will not happen without a 'a directive from the top, a political driver', either from within their organisations or externally from central government. There also needs to be more ring fencing and guidance on where to spend the money they have.

Interviewees in almost half the partnerships also make the point that sharing of resources is not all about money: it could entail sharing people or premises. One interviewee terms this 'aligning our resources for the common good'. It is also important to focus on outcomes and target resources at key people, families and neighbourhoods.

3.4 Guidance and support needs

The people that we spoke to are accessing a wide range of support and guidance to assist them with their child poverty work.

The majority of partnerships use various forms of documentary guidance including online guidance from the Child Poverty Unit (CPU), the Local Government Information and Development (LGID) needs assessment toolkit, and C4EO-validated practice examples and evidence-based reviews. They access the websites of Save the Children, National College for School Leadership (NCSL), The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC), and the Institute for

Fiscal Studies (IFS). Many have also used the recent Field, Allen, Munro and Marmot reviews (Field, 2010; Allen, 2011; Munro, 2010; Marmot, 2010). They also mention that the C4EO early intervention reports (such as C4EO, 2010) are very relevant.

Additionally, many have accessed sector-led support, tailored to their local context and needs, from C4EO sector specialists, regional advisors, and, in one LA, from independent consultants. Partnership leads are a central source of information and support. Additionally, partners use guidance and resources from other professionals working in the field. Child poverty partners have opportunities to network with colleagues more widely, for example, at regional child poverty meetings or through online networks (for example, the Child Poverty Community of Practice).

Sources that LAs and their partners access and find most useful

Interviewees identify three key sources for support and information.

- Child poverty leads 'champion the cause', provide leadership and distil essential information from all the guidance available.
- Colleagues in partnerships, organisations and neighbouring LAs offer expertise and the opportunity to network with other professionals face to face or online.
- CPU and C4EO offer online guidance, and C4EO's sector specialists act as 'critical friends' and reassure LAs that they are on the right track.

In one LA, where child poverty has been high on the agenda for some time, the experience of the partnership's members has been the single most important resource. They began working together on their child poverty strategy long before much guidance was available and are confident that they have the expertise internally to drive the strategy forward.

Interviewees' views on the key features of a useful resource

Most interviewees identified the following as key features of a useful support and guidance resource:

- contains examples of best (and worst) practice at strategic and operational level and practical suggestions
- provides case-study examples of LAs with similar issues and contexts, indicating how the model might be adapted and used elsewhere, so 'you can make your own choice about what is relevant to your area'
- contains 'high-level evidence-based sources', showing the objectives set, how these can be achieved and what the outcomes of an intervention will be
- is appropriate to the level of the audience
- is short and 'snappy', easy to assimilate, clearly set out and 'broken into chunks so people can dip in and out'
- makes links between the different factors that impact on child poverty
- is preferably available online (although elected members prefer well-produced hard copies).

Further support that interviewees would welcome

Child poverty partners would like a wide range of both strategic and practical support at national, regional, local and community levels.

Central government intervention

Interviewees say they would benefit from having central government advice on policy and macro-economic issues. Up-to-date statistics and greater access to academic journals would also be beneficial. One partner suggests there should be one website for documents which all can access, and regular email alerts when new information becomes available. Another believes that there is a need for forecasting

data on the impact of benefit changes and loss of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

Guidance on how to keep the profile of child poverty high

The profile of child poverty needs to be maintained so that reducing it becomes embedded in all LA work. This will help to achieve 'buy-in' from senior officers and elected members. One partner suggests that the LA should be publicly 'scrutinised and challenged' by the government and that 'some moral pressure would be appreciated'. Another believes that child poverty should be rebranded as family poverty, so it is seen as a cross-cutting issue for all services.

Examples of successful practice

One interviewee would like a national review of what works in alleviating child poverty. Another would like cross-regional poverty networks to share good practice and ideas.

Guidance on pooling budgets and value for money

On a practical level, partners would like more guidance on pooling budgets and streamlining processes without duplicating costs. They would also like business cases providing evidence of value for money.

Other guidance suggestions

Guidance would also be welcomed on collaborative working and how to identify 'hard-to-reach' groups, such as squatters.

External advice

They would like ongoing support from an external advisor, for example, a regional child poverty lead or a C4EO sector specialist, to help with developing the strategy and its implementation. Some LA areas would also like a dedicated officer who can identify information and undertake data analysis for the partnership.

Medium-term needs

Continued access to robust evidence, showing what works and with whom, would provide LAs and their partners with leverage and ammunition (which will become even more important as expenditure has to be justified). Concrete examples of business cases with cost implications would also be useful.

The interviewees said ongoing support from external advisors to champion the cause, ensure they adapt to need and help with action planning and delivery would be welcomed. Similarly, they would welcome tailored support on how to pool resources.

Longer-term needs (post June 2011)

Support will be needed for keeping partners engaged, driving the child poverty work forward and refreshing

the child poverty agenda, making sure it retains a high profile as services are restructured.

It is important that the CPU continues to have a role as a conduit for information and in maintaining the profile of child poverty across government.

Guidance would be welcome on the ideal situation of the child poverty partnership in the LA to achieve maximum reach and impact, and on how to broaden the agenda beyond financial poverty.

Interviewees have used a variety of resources in their child poverty work so far and are very clear about their future guidance and support requirements as they develop their child poverty needs assessments into strategy. The next chapter will discuss their progress as they make this transition.

4 Identifying the problem and framing the response

Key findings

- Most partnerships have already completed their CPNAs and the majority expect to publish their strategies between March and April 2011.
- The main challenge for compiling the CPNA is accessing and sharing appropriate data. This is because there is often a time lag between nationally produced data being collated and published. It can also be difficult for LAs to receive or share locality, or super-output-level, data due to data protection restrictions.
- The main challenges faced in strategy development include deciding priorities for action and committing to these in a period of economic uncertainty, and keeping the momentum going in the absence of central statutory guidance.
- Most partnerships have made a relatively smooth transition from CPNA to strategy. Factors that help are: involving the same people at both stages, viewing the CPNA as a forerunner to the strategy, making links between needs and actions and keeping both documents live and under review.
- Generally, children and young people have not been involved in strategic planning. This is partly because of cost and capacity, and partly because some partnerships lack confidence in the skills required. Some LA areas have successfully engaged young people through consultation, or by using materials generated by young people to influence strategic developments.

This chapter looks at the stage partnerships have reached with their CPNAs and strategies, the challenges they faced and how these have been overcome. It also considers how children and young people have been involved in strategy development.

The majority of partnerships have already completed their CPNAs and these have been fully signed off in seven LA areas, with only two areas explaining that they still have work to complete. Child poverty strategies are also developing well. Three LA areas have completed their strategy documents, four have framework documents in place, but more work to do to complete their strategies and two have yet to start work on their strategies. Almost all authorities are confident about publication. Three have already published their strategies, five expected to publish between March and April 2011 and only one is uncertain about its timescale for publication.

There is no apparent pattern in progress according to whether LAs are predominantly urban or rural, or whether they are under county or unitary control. Similarly, the political make-up of the local council appears to have no particular bearing on the rate of progress.

4.1 Developing the CPNA

Most LA areas have already completed their CPNA. The two areas that are still working on theirs explain that they are currently exploring local 'basket of indicators' data and considering ways of collecting local-level qualitative data on need. Although the rate of progress with CPNA development is good, progress has not been without its challenges. During the first phase of the research, child poverty partnership leads in each LA described the main challenges they faced:

- accessing and sharing the right data
- overcoming time, resource and capacity constraints.

During in-depth telephone interviews, we asked all interviewees to discuss whether or not the two main challenges had affected them when producing their CPNAs.

Accessing and sharing the right data

The balance of opinion across all the partners we spoke to in the nine LA areas, was that it has been a challenge to access and share the necessary data for developing the CPNA.

Two substantial barriers were identified. First, publically available data is often out of date by the time LAs and their partners are able to access it. Census data and data supplied by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are most commonly mentioned. Second, whilst it is possible to acquire data at the district or ward level, it can be very difficult to 'drill down' at the locality or super-output level. This means that it is hard to identify the neighbourhoods or specific families most in need of targeted support. This, in turn, affects effective strategy development.

Although the issue of time lag in the supply of nationally available data is commonly mentioned, case study 5 describes the involvement of one of our LA areas in a pilot study that is helping to overcome this issue.

Case study 5: A partnership involved in a DWP data-sharing project

This LA's CPNA is complete. However, the people that we spoke to in the Children's Trust, public health, the LA chief executive's office, the private sector and the VCS explained that they had faced challenges during the process. Their LA is predominantly urban, in the north of England, and has a child poverty rate in the highest quartile nationally.

Like in most other case-study LAs, there have been difficulties accessing timely and relevant national-level data related to a range of child poverty indicators including health statistics and rates of lone parenting. However, the LA is involved in a DWP data-sharing project. This means that the child poverty partnership receives key employment data and, specifically, statistics on worklessness in its LA and local output area. The data is broken down by a range of characteristics, such as the gender of those who

are out of work. It is also updated on a quarterly basis.

The pilot has been highly successful. The people that we spoke to said that it provides them with the 'real time' data that they need to track local rates of employment and worklessness, investigate the patterns emerging, and build a CPNA and child poverty strategy that is based on accurate intelligence.

Interviewees identified additional challenges related to accessing and sharing data. In some instances they also suggested possible solutions, as outlined below.

Complying with data protection guidelines

LAs and agencies often find it difficult to share, or are even prohibited from sharing, named or personal data. This means that it can be challenging to appropriately construct a CPNA that identifies key areas of need. One interviewee suggests that the legislation is often misunderstood, and she finds it frustrating that more local-level data cannot easily be shared: 'Moral panic is preventing good social practice.' In her view, it is often possible to work around data protection regulations 'as long as I tell my tenants that I am sharing their data, I can go ahead and do it'.

Overcoming the varying ways in which services collect and present their data

One interviewee describes 'medieval data collection systems'. Another believes that LAs need to develop better ICT systems that can overlay and match different data sources to better effect. One LA area is using a data-mapping model developed by the fire service. Initially, fire hotspots are identified, then crime, health and social care hotspots are 'layered in' on top. The result is that the partnership has been able to identify a concentration of neighbourhoods, streets and households most in need of targeted provision.

Dealing with the enormous wealth of available data

Finding ways to decide what data is most relevant and summarising it into something useful can also be a challenge. Different partnerships have different views on the best way of dealing with this. Some are employing specialist consultants to manage and analyse the data. Others are choosing to work only with top-level and nationally available data, keeping the CPNA brief, and progressing quickly to strategy development and implementation.

Encouraging all partners to share their data

Some providers are prevented by law from sharing personal data, or believe that they are unable to do so due to data protection guidelines. Suggestions for overcoming this include making the LSP the home of the child poverty partnership, rather than children's services. This can facilitate better sharing of data between adult and children's service providers. Another suggestion is to use the 'personal touch'. One child poverty lead has spent time telephoning each provider and discussing the value and potential ways of sharing data. This has had some good results in terms of a better supply of appropriate data for the child poverty lead.

Finding ways to collect and incorporate qualitative data and the views of children and young people into the CPNA

Some of our interviewees believe that one way around the problems associated with accessing neighbourhood-level statistical data is to collect data qualitatively through, for example, interviews and focus groups. However, some partnerships are unsure about how to do this in practice or how to access key user groups. More sharing of practice in this regard would be welcomed.

Overcoming time, resource and capacity constraint

Most interviewees recognise that completing a CPNA is a time-consuming and complex undertaking. However, very few believe that time, resource and capacity have been significant barriers to progress. There is only one LA area in which all interviewees view a lack of time and resource across the partnership as a major constraint to progress. In contrast, in the other eight LA areas, almost all interviewees say that they have managed their time effectively, and have been able to supply and use the necessary data within the resources provided through their 'day jobs'.

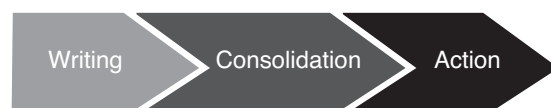
Child poverty leads are the only group of interviewees who say that it has been challenging to complete their CPNAs within the resources available to them. This reflects the fact that child poverty leads generally take responsibility for coordinating and analysing all data supplied nationally and by partner organisations. Most are doing this in addition to their day-to-day work roles. Furthermore, most LA areas do not have a dedicated child poverty officer or data lead who can remove some of the burden from child poverty leads. Many partnerships have not drawn down specific funding for child poverty work, and so child poverty leads have to undertake work related to the CPNA within the scope of their existing budgets.

One interviewee comments that most CPNAs have probably been completed as a result of child poverty leads' large degree of commitment, desire to succeed and a willingness to go the extra mile. Speaking about her own role, this interviewee comments: 'It was a labour of love that was only achieved by going beyond the call of duty.'

4.2 Developing the strategy

We asked interviewees to say where they thought their strategy development was situated on a continuum, as shown in Figure 4.1

Figure 4.1 The strategy development continuum



The majority of interviewees in six of the case-study LAs said that their partnerships have passed the writing stage and are moving towards consolidation of the strategy, or are writing their strategies and consolidating them concurrently. Examples include one area, where the child poverty lead is now drawing in statutory partners, working out their mutual contributions, and planning a possible timescale for implementation of the strategy. In another LA area, the strategy is based around a series of 'pledges' which commit partners to identify the action that they propose to take and the impact that this will have on families and communities locally. There are only two LA areas in which strategy development has not yet been started, or is in its very early stages.

Challenges faced

Partnerships have faced a number of challenges as they move along the strategy development continuum.

Five LA areas face the challenge of working out the developments that can realistically be made and committing to funding in a period of budgetary constraint and LA restructuring. One LA said it has lost 50 per cent of its staff and three members of its child poverty action group. An interviewee in another LA area comments: 'If we go from 14 to three debt counsellors, it doesn't matter how good our plan is.'

Making the transition from strategy to action has been challenging in four LA areas. For example, in one LA, the child poverty lead is finding it difficult to ensure that the ideas for action made by a range of partnership members are reflected in the strategy, and that the views of elected members do not predominate. In another, partners have now reached the 'crunch point' where they have to decide how to identify and act on priorities: 'We have had all the discussions and listed the priorities. This is a huge list, which we need to hone down to the key factors. The crunch is who is going to do it and how?'

Coping with a lack of clear government support, direction or progress monitoring is presenting issues in three areas. One child poverty lead commented that there was no sense of urgency to develop the strategy by the end of March because the government had not issued statutory guidance. Another believes that there is a need for government or 'legislative drivers' to

ensure that LAs keep on track with their child poverty strategic developments.

Two other challenges, each mentioned by just one interviewee, are deciding what the framework for strategy development should be, given the mass of data incorporated in the CPNA, and working through national-level policy tensions in the local strategic plan. An interviewee perceives a tension between Frank Field's focus on the importance of the early years and positive parenting (Field, 2010) and the direction being taken by DWP of encouraging single parents to enter or re-enter the labour market by the time their child turns five years old.

4.3 Making the transition from needs assessment to strategy

In most of the case-study areas, interviewees feel that it has been relatively straightforward to make the transition from the CPNA to the child poverty strategy. Two areas are unable to comment because they have barely started work on their strategies, but in the remaining seven areas people have found the process relatively 'seamless'. It is generally regarded as a much greater challenge to make the transition from strategy to action.

A number of factors were suggested as helping to make the transition from CPNA to strategy.

- The same organisations and people are involved in both stages (three LA areas) or a working group comprising some members from the CPNA group responsible for work on the strategy (two LA areas).
- All CPNA work is regarded as a 'prelude to the strategy', and conducted with the strategic plan in mind, rather than the CPNA and strategy being seen as separate exercises (two LA areas).
- There are links between the areas of need identified in the CPNA and action points in the strategy. Translating needs into actions, rather than questions, is helpful, and encouraging all partners to sign up to 'measurable pledges' is another useful approach (two LA areas).

- The CPNA and strategy are regarded as 'live' documents. Even once completed, partners view these as documents that will constantly be revisited and revised, and that are 'not set in stone' (one LA area).

Case study 6 outlines how one LA area has succeeded in making a seamless transition from CPNA to strategy.

Case study 6: A successful approach to addressing need and developing a strategy

This LA is building on a history of partnership working, which pre-dates the Child Poverty Act, as it plans to implement its child poverty strategy. The people we spoke to hold senior positions in children's services, health, housing, adult services, public health and JobCentre Plus. It is a predominantly urban and Labour-controlled LA in the north of England, with a child poverty rate in the second highest quartile nationally. The interviewees spoke positively about the progress achieved and its potential for making a difference to children's lives.

What has provided the impetus for progress?

There are four factors that have had a positive impact on progress.

- The strategic child poverty board has a direct reporting line to the LSP's executive. This has helped to engage a wide range of partners, not just those working in children's services.
- The board partner members have developed a collective understanding of child poverty. They have committed to the common purpose of making a difference to the lives of local families and have challenged each other to do so.
- The partnership has focused on making the most of nationally available data rather than getting immersed in the challenge of sharing locality-level data.

- Partner members view the CPNA and child poverty strategy as elements of an 'ongoing and continuous process' rather than as separate and specific activities.

The CPNA and the strategy are designed to complement each other and both are constantly being re-evaluated and updated. The same group of people is also involved at each stage. One of those we spoke to described this as an 'organic process'. Another explained that the CPNA was developed with the strategy and implementation in mind.

The LA's organic approach was demonstrated early in 2011 following publication of Frank Field's review of poverty and life chances (Field, 2010). The partnership decided to reconfigure its recently drafted strategy to reflect changing national priorities in tackling child poverty. Consequently, the child poverty strategy now has two major priorities: poverty-proofing all strategic plans in order to ensure that child poverty becomes 'everyone's business'; and focusing on early intervention as the best opportunity for improving children's life chances.

This process has generated a strategy that is designed to be 'live and relevant'. The strategy is now being translated into an action plan and the intention is to test it through a focused pilot project in a particularly deprived ward in the city.

4.4 Involving children and young people in strategy development

Under the duties placed upon them in the Child Poverty Act (DfE, 2010), LAs are encouraged to involve children and young people in the development of their child poverty strategies.

Even so, in most LA areas, there are highly variable levels of awareness about whether or not children and young people have been involved in the development of the child poverty strategy. This is an interesting finding. Even where one member of the partnership can vouch for the fact that some kind of consultation activity has taken place, most other partners are

unaware of this. This demonstrates that many local partnerships do not yet regard children and young people's participation as an integral component of strategy formation.

This finding is further illustrated by the fact that in five of the LA areas all the people we spoke to said children and young people have not yet been involved in any kind of consultative or participative activities. Most of these areas, however, recognise that it is important to involve children and young people, and plan to do this more effectively in the future.

One interviewee explains that there is a rationale to this decision. In his LA area, the needs assessment has been completed without reference to children and young people because 'we can't ask people if they feel that they are poor'. The intention is to engage children and young people at the 'problem-solving stage', once the issues have been identified. An interviewee in another LA area makes a similar point: the strategy itself is a high-level document and too 'dry' to involve children and young people in. He notes that 'the key will be involving them in implementation'. Further challenges to involving children and young people in strategy development are identified by a number of interviewees.

- Involvement is costly (it is often necessary to give incentives) and time consuming (there is not enough current capacity within the LA, and commissioning consultants is expensive). In the current climate of pressure on resources, this may not be regarded as a high priority.
- Talking with children and young people about poverty is very sensitive. This requires skill and expertise that is not necessarily readily available.
- There is a danger of making 'false promises' to service users that LAs may not be able to meet given budget shortages and the difficulties associated with tackling child poverty generally.

In four LA areas, however, children and young people have been involved in either the CPNA or strategy development. Case studies 7 and 8 show examples of how two of these LA areas have achieved this.

Case study 7: Involving children and young people through focus groups

This Labour-controlled LA in the Midlands is predominantly urban and has a child poverty rate that is in the top quartile nationally. The strategic partnership, known as the Child Poverty Challenge Group, has completed its CPNA and is currently developing its strategy. We spoke to a senior manager in children's services who told us that children and young people have been consulted at various stages of the process.

Children and young people were approached through neighbourhood forums and children's centres and asked to give their perspective on plans for tackling child poverty. A series of focus groups were held with a range of young people, including teenage parents. The same young people were asked to comment on the draft CPNA and give their reactions to it. One outcome of this exercise was a perceived need for better debt advice and better-tailored service provision. These views were incorporated into the final version of the CPNA. As the strategy develops, the partnership intends to continue to seek children and young people's endorsement at every stage.

Case study 8: Children and young people's views as a starter for strategy development

This predominantly urban and Labour-controlled LA in the north of England has a child poverty rate in the second highest quartile nationally. The LA has already completed its CPNA and has published its child poverty strategy. We spoke to the LA health, housing and adult services managers, who explained how children and young people's views have helped to shape the local child poverty strategy in his area.

Initially, the leaving care service helped a number of young people to put together a DVD about the realities of leaving care and living with economic

and social disadvantages. This DVD was shared at a child poverty partnership meeting, just as decisions were about to be made about translating the CPNA into a strategy. The views expressed by the young people were incorporated into the strategy development and the DVD was used as a powerful tool to help launch the strategy. The young people were also consulted about the strategy as it developed through its various drafts.

Most LA areas are progressing well on the continuum from assessment to strategy and action. While a number of challenges are identified, these have rarely been insurmountable, and most LA areas expect to publish their strategies within the next month or two. The biggest current challenge for LAs and their partners is how to turn their strategic planning into effective action to tackle local child and family poverty.

5 Moving from strategy to action

Key findings

- Child poverty partners are concerned about whether their strategies will have a positive impact on families and children. Their concerns relate to budget reductions and service cut-backs, rising poverty rates due to the increasing cost of living and the enormity of the task of overcoming structural and culturally ingrained poverty.
- Partners are also realistic. Many believe that partnerships can make a difference if they focus on direct intervention with families rather than on macro-economic issues. Initially, most partnerships are planning to tackle poverty in small and manageable ways by focusing on specific localities, families and groups.
- Only one LA area has planned a coordinated intervention project resulting specifically from the child poverty strategy. Others are using a range of pre-existing interventions based around four objectives: reducing worklessness, improving financial literacy, improving health and giving children the best start in life.
- The main reasons given for progress in implementing the strategy are the strength of local partnerships, LA executive and cabinet 'buy-in', the leadership qualities of the child poverty lead and the availability of centrally funded child poverty grants.

This chapter considers views about the likely impact of the child poverty strategy, plans for putting the strategy into action and factors that have enabled local areas to make progress with implementation.

5.1 Views on the likely impact of the strategy

Almost all the people we spoke to are passionate about making their child poverty strategies work and want to make a difference to the lives of local families and children. However, in many cases they have deep concerns about the reality of achieving this goal. Their worries can be categorised into three main themes:

- budget reductions and resultant service cut backs
- the broader economic climate and fears that this will impact hard upon families that are already struggling to support themselves
- the enormity of the task of tackling deeply entrenched and in some cases inter-generational cycles of worklessness and benefit dependency.

Before discussing these themes in greater detail, it is worth also noting some of the additional points made by small numbers of interviewees. These include a fear that central government policy on child poverty will change before local practice becomes embedded, a concern that central government policy is tending towards a focus on the older rather than the younger population and concerns about how LAs' successes in child poverty work will be measured: 'What constitutes a successful outcome?'

Budget reductions and resultant service cut-backs

Almost all interviewees express concern about budget reductions. There are personal fears of redundancy and also the fear of losing essential knowledge and expertise within the LA. Very often, strategies like child poverty are driven by champions and those with commitment to the cause. It can be hard to maintain the necessary momentum when their expertise and enthusiasm is lost.

Interviewees are also concerned about whether or not it will be possible to continue to deliver services to the most vulnerable families as LAs reconfigure and have to think hard about the services that they can afford to provide. One interviewee is certain that 'the level of cuts will impede our ability to address child poverty'. Another is sceptical about the notion that the Big Society will be able to pick up where LA services have left off:

It is the same with all governments. There is a lack of permanency and a fallacy that communities can do it themselves. They [communities] have no resources – financial, physical, emotional – or time.

The impact of the broader economic climate

Around half of the case-study areas are uncertain that they will be able to make a difference to families' lives as many see their financial circumstances worsen. Particular points mentioned include general increases in the cost of goods and services (specifically fuel and food), the rise in VAT and recent reforms to the benefits system. Interviewees also believe that it is virtually impossible for LAs and their partners 'single-handedly' to raise family income and maximise employment when the supply of local jobs is falling.

The enormity of the task

Interviewees in three case-study areas indicate feeling overwhelmed by the task ahead of them, and sceptical about whether their collective efforts can make the necessary difference because much poverty is structural, deeply entrenched and inter-generational. Tackling this requires macro-economic policy attention and cannot be addressed by an LA partnership alone. Poverty can also be cultural. Some interviewees mention communities with a culture of low aspiration, low family expectation, benefit dependency and low confidence to leave their immediate neighbourhoods to seek work. Coupled with a low supply of local work opportunities, these factors generate cynicism and 'cycles' of generational unemployment, which are very hard to tackle.

While many interviewees recognise these challenges, others also stress the importance of not getting

overwhelmed by macro-economic issues. Six case-study areas believe that it is important to be clear about the impact that local partnerships can and cannot have: 'We can win a few battles, if not the entire war.' An LA adult services manager comments that if partnerships choose to focus on structural issues such as employment, then it is indeed difficult to have much impact. However, he argues that if they focus on direct intervention with families through, for example, family intervention projects (FIPs), housing support, debt advice and tackling fuel poverty, then they have real capacity to make a difference.

A child poverty lead in a different LA area believes that LA partnerships have an important role to play in 'mitigating the risk' of child poverty. Both the Frank Field (Field, 2010) and Graham Allen (Allen, 2011) reviews focus on the importance of early intervention to maximise life chances, and this is where local-level work can make a real difference.

What can local partnerships do to ensure impact?

Answers to this are similar to those related to how to overcome the enormity of the task. Most partnerships are planning to tackle child poverty, initially, in a small and manageable way. This will involve a mix of focusing action at the level of the locality or family, targeting resources and interventions at a small number of the most disadvantaged wards, initially focusing on a small number of elements from the strategy and targeting resources at specific groups in need such as young parents, the homeless and traveller communities. Interviewees are confident that this focused approach will allow their partnerships to have a positive impact on families in need.

LAs are adopting additional measures to ensure impact is embedded in their systems and processes. Three are attempting to ensure that child poverty becomes absorbed into all LA strategies. One child poverty lead describes this as 'poverty-proofing'. The goal is to make the eradication of child poverty 'everyone's business'. Two others are doing all they can to keep the partnership together and keep child poverty high on the agendas of the LSP executive and Children's Trust Board. A further two will be closely monitoring and evaluating their own work and successes, and sharing examples of good practice with all partners.

5.2 Putting the strategy into action

All but one of our case-study LAs provide evidence of projects that are being adopted to tackle child poverty. However, only one, so far, has planned a coordinated child poverty intervention project that results specifically from the work undertaken for the child poverty strategy. Details of the approach adopted by this LA area are presented in case study 9.

A range of pre-existing projects and interventions are mentioned by interviewees across the LA areas, some of which are likely to be built into ongoing plans for action against child poverty. These interventions focus on four objectives:

- reducing worklessness through community-based education and employment schemes
- improving financial literacy and money-management skills and enhancing benefits advice
- improving children's health outcomes through targeted interventions
- giving children the best start in life by focusing on early years provision.

Reducing worklessness

Interviewees from across six LA areas mentioned this goal. They describe a number of approaches being tested to increase employment prospects, tackle unemployment and increase inward investment into their areas.

Many of the LA areas are working to place a team around the whole family, rather than dealing only with unemployed adults. In one area, this is done through a project called Families Into Work, which aims to help adults increase their skills and find work whilst supporting children and young people in the family to improve school attendance and help them access further education and training. Similarly, a project in another LA area provides mentoring for Level 2 learners and helps them to re-access education and employment. This builds on an early intervention rationale and aims to minimise rates of adult unemployment in the future.

Improving financial literacy and money management skills

Projects related to this outcome are in place in five LA areas. Typically, they are based around a model where multi-agency teams provide advice and support to families in the places that they frequent. So, for example, in one area the CAB is working in children's centres, primary schools and adult learning to boost money management skills.

In another LA area, the School Gates initiative places staff from JobCentre Plus, welfare to work and jobs, education and training into schools and children's centres to give financial advice to parents.

In a third LA area, the Quids for Kids programme helps to ensure families with special needs children receive the benefits to which they are entitled. The child poverty lead believes that this programme has had a big impact. For a relatively small investment by the LA, each family has benefited by approximately £4000.

Improving children's health outcomes

Three LA areas are adopting specific interventions to improve children's health and wellbeing. Two of these are piloting the Family-Nurse Partnerships scheme, originally introduced in the USA. This scheme provides an intensive three-year support programme for young mothers that includes childcare and helps them to improve their parenting skills, develop employability skills and, potentially, enter employment. Anecdotal evidence in one of the LA areas suggests the intervention is making a positive difference to families' lives.

Two of the LA areas are also working to increase the take-up of free school meals (FSM) and, hence, the likelihood of poorer children having at least one nutritious meal a day. One of these LA areas is trialling a new approach to FSM take-up, by changing the system to one in which parents opt out of rather than opt into provision. As the newly introduced pupil premium is directed towards children in receipt of FSM, this strategy has the potential to impact on both health and educational outcomes.

Giving children the best start in life

Only two LA areas mention interventions that are specifically focused on the early years of a child's life. However, this is an area of intervention that is likely to increase in light of the recent reviews by Frank Field (Field, 2010) and Graham Allen (Allen, 2011).

One of these LA areas is involved in a pilot of free entitlement to early education and childcare for disadvantaged two year olds, funded by the Department for Education. Families involved in the pilot receive support to develop a home-learning environment as well as a range of practical inputs related to health, housing, personal skills, counselling and employment. The pilot was externally evaluated in 2010 and results show that the children involved benefited from the language, social skills and general development support provided. Parents also reported that the pilot helped them with their parenting skills and with practical concerns about housing and benefits.

With the exception of these few evidence-based examples, most interviewees are unable to say whether their various programmes are having an impact on child poverty or on children's outcomes. However, one child poverty lead claims that 7000 children in her area have been lifted out of poverty as a result of a range of interventions such as those discussed here.

5.3 Factors that have enabled progress in implementation

Interviewees are unable to provide concrete or specific reasons for their progress in consolidating the child poverty strategy or moving to implementation. Four LA areas believe that they are not yet far enough along the continuum to comment, whilst most others refer to various factors to do with their local systems. These include: the strength of their partnership arrangements; the fact that they have 'buy-in' at executive and cabinet level; the fact that they have well-developed needs assessments and, in some cases, timetables for implementation; and the strength and quality of the child poverty lead in driving forward the child poverty work and providing good leadership.

Three LA areas additionally believe that the government-funded child poverty grant to LAs has been crucial in enabling work to progress, and that the child poverty legislation itself (England and Wales Statutes, 2010) has enabled work to be undertaken that would otherwise not have been possible. Case study 9 provides a more detailed example of how one LA area has managed the move from strategy to implementation.

Case study 9: Effective implementation planning

This LA's child poverty strategy has not yet been finalised, but the strategic partnership, known as the Child Poverty Challenge Group, is already putting in place plans for a child poverty pilot project, due to take effect from March 2011. This Labour-controlled LA in the Midlands is predominantly urban and has a child poverty rate that is in the top quartile nationally.

The pilot involves specialist training for all front-line staff to help them recognise, advise and act when they become aware of poverty. It will be extended to staff that do not always work with children or families living in poverty, including police and fire officers, midwives, librarians and housing officers. All those we spoke to agreed that there are three advantages to this training approach as opposed to service-specific in-house training: all public services learn that poverty matters, all front-line staff are trained to identify concerning situations as they encounter them and all practitioners learn how to make referrals to other agencies, when appropriate.

Additionally, the Challenge Group is providing a new service for families, known as the multi-agency bus. This service is being jointly coordinated by the CAB, the Credit Union and the LA benefits team. Families will be able to visit the bus for a financial health check, and benefits and debt advice, while their children are being cared for. The bus will be parked near the places that families visit, such as children's centres, in order to maximise their chances of using the service.

What has enabled this area to move to implementation planning so swiftly?

Poverty is very visible in this LA. All members of the Challenge Group, and of the cabinet, are passionate about improving family circumstances, increasing the city's prosperity and encouraging inward investment. This has created an impetus for swift action.

The Challenge Group made a conscious decision not to get 'bogged down in the detail' of data analysis. The CPNA was completed in November 2010, and it is described as 'deliberately short'. The Challenge Group decided to use data that was easily at its disposal in order to move swiftly to strategic and operational planning, rather than to get stalled by the complexities of accessing super-output-level data.

Members of the Challenge Group viewed the CPNA as 'a prelude to the strategy', rather than as an activity in its own right. The same people have been involved through all stages of development, and the group has been thinking about how child poverty should be tackled 'on the ground' since first discussions about the CPNA. The partnership is currently developing a similarly short strategy, which will be structured around the Child Poverty Unit's four building blocks framework.

The developments in this LA show that there is a difference between strategy as a document, and strategic thinking. The Child Poverty Challenge Group has gone through a process of strategic planning and now has the confidence to move to implementation, even though the strategy document is not yet finalised.

6 Recommendations for policymakers and local partnerships

The following three questions arise from this report:

- How can the status of child poverty be kept high amidst concerns about budget reductions and LA service reconfiguration?
- How can LAs and their partners develop firm, collaborative partnerships that can assess local need effectively and develop robust child poverty strategies?
- How can LAs and their partners succeed in driving forward work to tackle child poverty in their local areas?

6.1 How can the status of child poverty be kept high?

Recommendations for central policy

Central government needs to do all it can to assuage the fears of those working in LA partnerships with regard to: concerns about the worsening plight of families living in poverty due to the impacts of the recession and fears that LAs will not be able to meet these needs as services are reconfigured. LAs and their partners would welcome:

- ‘morale-boosting’ statements from central government about the importance of child poverty work and the need to keep it on track (to reassure LAs and their partners that tackling poverty is still a high priority at central and local levels)
- concrete examples of how the ‘Big Society’ will take forward child poverty work effectively if local services are unable to commit necessary resources
- assurances that central funding will remain in place for child poverty work through direct grants to LAs
- clarification of apparent tensions between the poverty measures in the Child Poverty Act, new measures suggested in Frank Field’s 2010 Review, and DWP policy directives around parents with young children seeking work.

Recommendations for local policy and practice

The LG Group has a pivotal role to play in helping LAs and their partners to keep the status of child poverty high. LAs can benefit particularly from guidance about how to ‘position’ their partnerships strategically within the LA in order to maximise their impact. Central positioning (for example, within the umbrella of the LSP) means that there is a greater likelihood of a wide range of partners (not just from children’s services) being involved, better prospects for data sharing across LA departments and greater likelihood of joint commissioning of services.

Additional suggestions are that it is important to:

- share analyses and strategy documents with elected members and attempt to secure cabinet ‘buy-in’
- encourage elected members or senior executive-level staff to chair partnership meetings (some LAs have struggled to gain the support of their elected members for their poverty work and would welcome guidance on how to engage them)
- ensure that the child poverty lead has strong leadership qualities and the necessary level of seniority and influence across the whole LA area
- draw senior partners from across the LA, other statutory partners and the VCS into the child poverty partnership.

6.2 How can LAs develop firm, collaborative partnerships?

Recommendations for central and local policy

In order to form effective and efficient partnerships, LAs currently need more support on specific issues, as outlined below.

- **Budget pooling and alignment.** LAs are rarely pooling their budgets at present and require guidance on how to go about this. They would also welcome broader advice on pooling or aligning 'resources', as opposed to money.
- **Evidence of 'what works' in tackling child poverty.** LAs and their partners would like costed 'business cases' providing evidence of impact and value for money.
- **Available intelligence on all matters related to child poverty policy and practice.** LAs and their partners would like a single source of information, a 'one-stop shop', where all with a stake in child or family policy (not just those working within children's services), can go to gain information.
- **Ways to attract the private sector** to contribute to local child poverty developments, and strategies for encouraging inward investment into disadvantaged areas.

Recommendations for local practice

Responsible LAs need to ensure that certain ingredients are in place in order to nurture firm, collaborative partnerships. Key ingredients of successful collaborations are:

- exceptional leadership – ideally from someone with a cross-LA function
- a clear statement of different partner organisations' roles and responsibilities
- a shared commitment to tangible, mutually agreed outcomes for children and families

- the right mix of people – including senior strategists and operational managers – both those who do, and do not, usually work with children
- close working with the VCS.

Where partnerships have developed from a historical working relationship, they are usually stronger and more cohesive. LAs that have been able to involve elected members or executive-level staff in their partnerships generally report that child poverty has high profile in their local areas.

6.3 How can LAs drive forward their child poverty work?

Recommendations for central and local policy

LAs and their partners need a number of 'tools' in order to progress with their child poverty planning and action, as outlined below.

- **Some level of central prescription** is needed, even if only at the level of minimum expected standards or statutory monitoring of progress
- **Accurate and timely national and local-level prevalence data.** Partners involved in a DWP data-sharing pilot found this to be a breakthrough in terms of receiving 'real time' data. A 'mainstreaming' of this approach could be advantageous.
- **Clear guidance on the types of data covered by Data Protection legislation.** Advice on the types of data that partners can share, and the ways in which they can share it, would also be welcomed.
- **More accurate ICT systems** to enable different data sources to be 'overlaid' in order to identify neighbourhood or street-level 'hot spots' for action.
- **Practical guidance on what should be included in the CPNA.** Although Local Government Information and Development (LGID) guidance is already in place, some areas would welcome practical help regarding the scale and scope of the data that should be included, and ways of focusing it.

- **Advice on developing the CPNA into a strategy and moving from strategy to implementation.** It is important for LAs to recognise that all three stages are part of a continuum which should, ideally, involve the same organisations and people.

Recommendations for local practice

LAs and their partners need to be realistic in their child poverty outcome goals. Most recognise that they cannot, single-handedly, eradicate deep-seated structural or culturally ingrained poverty, increase adult employment rates, or maximise family income. However, there is much that local partnerships can do to mitigate the effects of poverty. Suggestions for achieving this include the following.

- Keeping interventions specific, family focused and manageable, for example, by focusing on particular neighbourhoods, families or groups.
- 'Poverty-proofing' all LA strategic plans in order to make sure that poverty policy has high status across the LA and to make sure that it is 'everyone's business'.
- Ensuring that child poverty does not become 'marooned' solely as a children's services issue.
- Self-monitoring and evaluation of both processes and outcomes, and sharing of good practice, both across the LA partnership, and through regional networks.

Appendix A

This research is based on in-depth telephone interviews undertaken with 43 members of strategic staff from LAs and their partner organisations between January and March 2011.

Selection of case-study areas

The nine case-study areas were selected for research following an earlier phase of the research, which was undertaken in November 2010. This phase comprised a short questionnaire to child poverty leads in all top-tier LAs. Forty three LAs (28 per cent of all top-tier authorities) responded to the questionnaire with brief details about their progress in forming area-wide collaborations, completing their CPNAs and developing their child poverty strategies.

We looked at three sets of information to help us decide which LA areas to select for the second phase of the research.

- **First, progress in tackling child poverty, as indicated in questionnaire responses.** Responses were coded into four categories of progress (with 1 showing the greatest progress – ‘needs assessment and strategy completed’, and 4 showing the least – ‘no evidence of any child poverty activity’). We created a short list of all responses coded as a category 1 or category 2 (‘strong evidence that needs assessment and/or strategy is underway’).
- **Second, willingness of the child poverty lead to be involved** in the second phase of the research

(all respondents were asked to tick a box if they were willing to be contacted again). Those who ticked the box (28) were matched against those in categories 1 and 2 above to create a final shortlist.

- **Third, contextual information.** Two contextual factors were prioritised. Geographical location: one case study was selected in each of the nine former Government Office Regions. Levels of child poverty: case studies were selected to be representative of a variety of levels of poverty using data from a recent mapping report published by NFER on behalf of the LG Group (Mehta, 2010).

A profile of the selected areas at the time of the first phase of the research is shown in Table A1.

Selection of interviewees

Once the case study areas were selected, we contacted the child poverty lead in each area (who had already completed our phase 1 questionnaire) to check that they were still willing to be involved in the research. All were. We conducted a telephone interview with the child poverty lead in each area, and then asked them to identify up to four other members of strategic staff from their child poverty partnerships to undertake an interview with us.

This process worked extremely well. Overall, we identified and successfully undertook 43 interviews across the nine areas. This was an average of five interviews per partnership, including the child poverty lead. The range of people that we spoke to was diverse and is summarised in Table A2.

Table A1 Profile of case-study areas – at Phase 1 of the research (November 2010)

Child poverty quartile	Urban/Rural	Stage of collaboration	Progress with CPNA	Progress with strategy
Highest = 3	Urban = 6	Very good = 6	Completed = 6	Fully developed = 2
2nd highest = 2	Rural = 3	Fairly good = 2	Partially completed = 3	Good progress = 3
2nd lowest = 2		Early stages = 1		Early stages = 4
Lowest = 2				
Total = 9				

Table A2 Summary of interviewee types

Interviewee	Number
Child poverty lead	9
Local authority staff:	
• Children's services	6
• Adult employment and skills	4
• Economic regeneration	1
• Welfare and benefits	1
• ICT	1
Total	13
Voluntary and Community Sector (including CAB)	6
Public health	5
Job Centre Plus	3
Housing provider (ALMO)	3
Local Strategic Partnership	1
Elected members	1
Probation	1
Private sector	1
TOTAL	43

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Recently published reports

The Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme is carried out by the NFER. The research projects cover topics and perspectives that are of special interest to local authorities. All the reports are published and disseminated by the NFER, with separate executive summaries. The summaries, and more information about this series, are available free of charge at www.nfer.ac.uk/research/local-government-association/



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<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/LGMS01>



Safeguarding children peer review programme: learning and recommendations

Based on telephone interviews with staff from five local authorities and their partners, this study draws out key messages from the programme, covering the impacts of a safeguarding peer review, key benefits and challenges, organisational and contextual factors, and learning and recommendations for the sector.

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/LSGP01>



Hidden talents: exploiting the link between engagement of young people and the economy

This report identifies a range of opportunities for local authorities and businesses to work together for mutual benefit. It provides case studies showing how local authorities can create links between their work to engage young people, economic development and business support, in order to achieve improved outcomes for young people and employers.

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The Child Poverty Act placed a legal obligation on government to end child poverty in the UK by 2020. It also placed new duties on local government to tackle child poverty.

The Local Government Group (LG Group) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake research to assess the progress made by local authorities in meeting these new duties. This report presents the findings from in-depth telephone interviews with child poverty partnership members across nine case-study areas. It covers:

- the status of child poverty work
- collaborative approaches
- child poverty needs assessments and strategies
- moving from strategy to action
- recommendations for policymakers and local partnerships.

It will be of interest to policy colleagues at the LG Group, child poverty leads and those involved in planning and delivering child poverty strategies in local authorities and their partner agencies.