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To: Social Care & Public Health Cabinet Committee, 12th June 2013

Subject: **CHILD POVERTY STRATEGY**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: The draft Kent Child Poverty Strategy updates the Committee on Kent's approach to child poverty, including discharging responsibilities under the Child Poverty Act 2010, and provides a strategic action plan and monitoring framework against which progress will be tracked.

Recommendations: The Committee is asked to comment on the draft Strategy prior to consideration by the Integrated Children's Services Board, and Cabinet Member approval.

1. Background

(1) Part 2 of the Child Poverty Act 2010 requires county and unitary authorities to set out their strategic priorities for child poverty in line with the national target of ending child poverty by 2020. The original legislation required such authorities to undertake a child poverty needs assessment and prepare a child poverty strategy for their area, with provisions in the act for further requirements to be set out in statutory guidance from the Secretary of State.

(2) However, the incoming coalition government subsequently decided in August 2010 that they would not issue statutory guidance in regards to Part 2 of the Act, in support of the localism agenda and the Coalition's broader commitment to reduce unnecessary legislative and bureaucratic burdens on local authorities. This was intended to support the ongoing activity in many local authority areas to address child poverty, and provide discretion about how authorities were to discharge their duties under the act. The non-statutory guidance that subsequently emerged clarified expectations:

- a) That authorities were required to undertake and publish a child poverty needs assessment, but this could be integrated into other needs assessments as required.
- b) No requirement for authorities to publish a separate stand-alone child poverty strategy (although they are free to do so) where their strategies for tackling child poverty are discharged through, or can be incorporated, into other activity.

- c) An ability to track progress on approaches and activities for tackling child poverty is necessary for local authorities to evidence that they are discharging their duties under the Act.

(3) The guidance also stressed the multi-faceted approach required to tackle child poverty, with the emphasis on the need for county and unitary authorities to utilise partnership networks wherever possible to take forward the child poverty agenda in their area.

(4) In 2011, the Government subsequently published the national Child Poverty Strategy, *A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families' Lives* which emphasised the need for:

- A stronger focus on ensuring that families who are in work are supported to work themselves out of poverty
- Support for families who are unable to work to live with dignity
- Provision of services for those who can work but are not in work to help them overcome barriers to accessing employment
- Early intervention by intervening early to improve the development and attainment of disadvantaged children and young people throughout their progression to adulthood.
- A stronger focus on place and delivering services as close to the family as possible

(5) In November 2012 the Government launched a consultation about how to measure child poverty, recognising that it is not only about low income, but also low aspirations and opportunities, and limited choices that then prevent children from reaching their full potential. The Government is therefore looking to broaden the definition of child poverty from one focussed solely on income and material deprivation to one that also encompasses other dimensions such as housing, parental skill levels, family stability and parental health.

(6) Kent's approach to date has been focussed on integrating activity to tackle child poverty into its broader activity to support vulnerable families, in much the same way as the national strategy has done. Kent's needs assessment, refreshed in 2012 to take account of the most up to date data nationally and locally, confirmed the need for a focus on sustainable employment, and recognised that children must not be seen in isolation from the wider circumstances of their families and communities. However, the combination of the economic climate and welfare reform changes, which are increasing the pressures on families nationally in the short-term, provided an impetus for a stand-alone Kent Child Poverty Strategy for 2013-16.

2 Relevant priority outcomes

(1) The Child Poverty Strategy builds on and impacts on all three of the ambitions in Bold Steps for Kent:

- a) *Growing the Economy* (there needs to be good jobs for people as the most important route out of poverty is usually getting sufficient, reasonably paid work)

- b) *Tackling Disadvantage* (this incorporates priorities around reducing health and educational inequalities, promoting early intervention and prevention, and focussing on the early years)
- c) *Putting the Citizen in Control* (encouraging people to take responsibility for improving life for themselves and others in their community).

3 Consultation and Communication

(1) Discussions about the Strategy have been held with the Joint Commissioning Board, the Kent Council Leaders' Tackling Disadvantage Sub-Group and the Kent Youth County Council. In addition, a multi-agency workshop was held on 30 January to identify the key components of the Strategy, and earlier drafts have been shared with invitees and participants.

4. Financial Implications

(1) None directly – the action plan is about how to best use existing resources in a difficult financial climate, rather than seeking new expenditure.

5. Legal Implications

(1) The Strategy and action plan will become the over-arching vehicle by which KCC discharges its responsibilities under the Child Poverty Act 2010.

6. Kent's Child Poverty Strategy

(1) The Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services commissioned the Policy & Strategic Relationships Team to develop a Child Poverty Strategy, and this action is contained within the 2013-14 Business Strategy Business Plan. The rationale for developing the strategy is that families in Kent (and nationally) are under particular financial pressure because of the economic climate, and in some cases this is exacerbated in the short-term by the welfare reform changes. Child poverty can have profound and long-term effects on children, blighting their future. It is therefore vital that the County Council focuses on how it can reduce and alleviate child poverty across all its services.

(2) One of the challenges in writing a Child Poverty Strategy is the breadth of the subject, which touches just about everything the County Council does. This Strategy has therefore been kept deliberately short and very high level, providing a framework against which child poverty can be tracked, and an action plan that marshals current activity against the priorities of the Strategy. It does not stand alone, but is closely connected to other strategies, notably Unlocking Kent's Potential (Kent's strategy for growth and jobs), Bold Steps for Education, and Mind the Gap (Kent's Health Inequalities Action Plan). A separate report, going to Policy & Resources Cabinet Committee in June, has been commissioned specifically on the impact of welfare reform changes, and the need to develop a methodology to track that impact, and that will be one of the key ways in which changes in child poverty will also be tracked.

(3) The Strategy emphasises the importance of both short and long-term actions. The top priority is the alleviation of extreme poverty, as no child should be

in a situation where they do not have enough food, suitable clothing, or suitable housing. But it also seeks to prevent today's children in poverty from becoming tomorrow's poor adults, by promoting those factors that protect children from the long-term impact of poverty (such as learning, high aspirations for the future, and strong social networks). The diagram on page 10 of the Strategy summarises this.

(4) Following discussion at this Cabinet Committee, the draft Strategy, which covers the period 2013-2016, will be considered by the Integrated Children's Services Board prior to Cabinet Member approval. Annual reports will then be provided to the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services and the Corporate Director for Families & Social Care on progress.

7. Recommendations

(1) The Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee is asked to comment on the draft Strategy prior to consideration by the Integrated Children's Services Board, and Cabinet Member approval.

8. Background Documents

- A guide to part 2 of the Child Poverty Act 2010: Duties of Local Authorities and Other Bodies in England, Department for Education
- Child Poverty in Kent, Research & Evaluation Statistical Bulletin, KCC, January 2012
- Family Poverty Strategy, Research Analysis and Summary, KCC, August 2012
- Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14, Needs Assessment for Children and Young People, KCC, 2010

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