

Social Justice & Regeneration Committee

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Date: 3 May 2006

Venue: National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Title: Child Poverty Implementation Plan: Deputy Minister's Proposals

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to update Committee on proposals developed by the Deputy Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration to take forward the Assembly Government's Child Poverty Strategy.

Summary / Recommendations

Following the February 2005 Plenary debate on the launch of the Child Poverty Strategy, A Fair Future for our Children, I asked my Deputy Minister to lead on the development of proposals to take forward Assembly Government action on combating child poverty. The Committee Paper reflects consideration of the first phase of proposals by Cabinet on 3 April 2006.

Background

Since 1997, 2.1 million children in the UK have been taken out of absolute poverty. The Policy Studies Institute states that the number of children living in households where the median income is below 60 per cent of the average was 3.6 million in 2002-03, representing a drop of 0.8 million since 1996-97. The latest Households Below Average Income report, published by the Department for Work and Pensions on 9th March 2006, shows that for the three-year average 2002-03 to 2004-05, after housing costs, 28 per cent of children in Wales were living in households in relative income poverty. Thanks to sizeable falls in recent years this is equal to the average for Great Britain. Wales has a lower rate of relative child poverty than London, the North East, the West Midlands, the North West and Merseyside, and Yorkshire and the Humber. The relatively strong performance of the labour market in Wales is likely to be a key cause of this improvement, since it has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of households that are dependent on benefits as a result of unemployment or economic inactivity.

The Assembly Government's Child Poverty Strategy was launched in February 2005 ([link](#)). The Strategy reaffirms the Assembly Government's commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020 and to halve child poverty by 2010, compared with 1997 figures. The approach adopted by the Strategy is informed by the findings of, and consultation on, the report of the independent Child Poverty Task Group. The Assembly

Government has repeatedly made clear that tackling child poverty is a fundamental component of its broader strategy to improve quality of life and extend opportunity to every community in Wales.

Consideration

The Deputy Minister has developed a range of general and specific policy proposals. The proposals are grouped in three phases:

- Phase 1 - incorporating those proposals to be taken forward over the next 12 months;
- Phases 2 and 3 – proposals that will remain under consideration and have the potential to be taken forward post -2007.

Annex A outlines the first phase of proposals, together with an indication of how they will be implemented. Committee will note that whilst the majority fall within my Social Justice and Regeneration portfolio, some cut across other Ministerial responsibilities. This reflects the cross cutting nature of the causes of child poverty and the action needed to combat it. I propose that implementation and monitoring of the proposals would be undertaken by my officials in the Communities Directorate who will liaise with officials from across the Assembly Government. Annex B provides an update of progress on the Child Poverty Strategy outlining what the Assembly Government is doing and will continue to do over the next 12 months to combat child poverty.

On the issue of targets, and with the agreement of my Cabinet colleagues, the Assembly Government has identified those major policy areas where it will commit to developing targets and will set medium term (2010) milestones and long term (2020) targets so that our progress in eradicating child poverty can be measured over time. These are set out in Annex C.

Finally, and in the context of potential new powers forthcoming under the new Government of Wales Act, I intend to consider developing a new 'Measure' post 2007, to combat child poverty. It is vitally important that the Assembly uses all the levers at its disposal in this policy area, and the potential use of the new powers needs to be an important part of our future effort. Following Cabinet agreement, the Deputy Minister will seek views from a variety of organisations in the sector across Wales on what that Measure, or Measures, should entail. The Deputy Minister will be particularly keen to seek the views of organisations about the experiences of hard to reach groups, such as disabled children, young carers and those for whom English or Welsh is not the main language.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this paper at this stage.

Cross Cutting Themes

The nature of child poverty policy is that it is cross-cutting in scope. Equality of opportunity and

sustainable development will also be considered in further developing and implementing the proposals.

Action for Subject Committee

The Committee is asked to note the first phase of proposals developed by the Deputy Minister and the proposed further action.

Edwina Hart AM

Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration

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