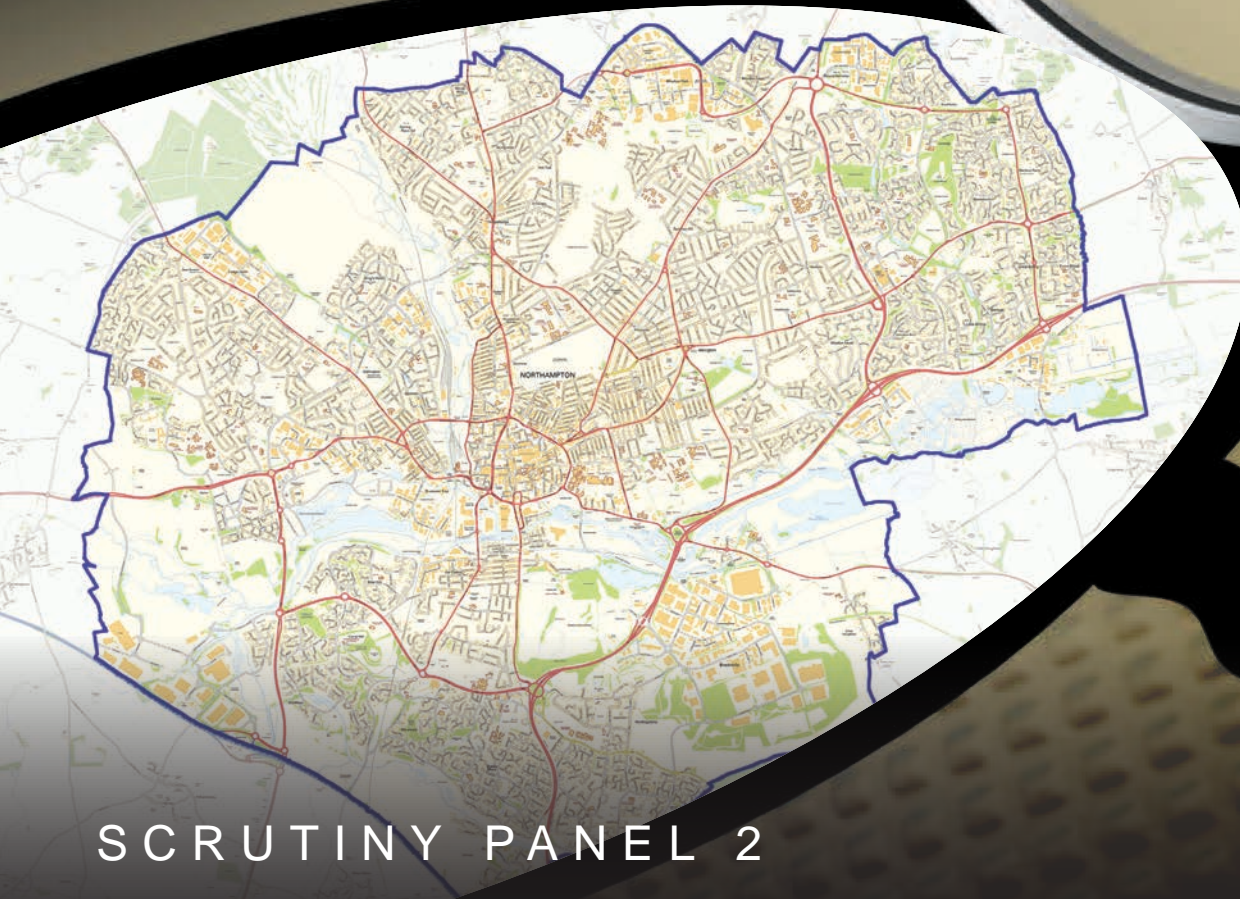


Overview & Scrutiny Committee



SCRUTINY PANEL 2

Poverty in the Town

March 2015

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NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Index

| | |
|--|----|
| Chair's Foreword | 2 |
| Executive Summary | 4 |
| Final Report including recommendations | 12 |

APPENDICES

| | |
|------------|--|
| Appendix A | Scope of the Review |
| Appendix B | Core Questions |
| Appendix C | Results of the desktop research exercise |

Foreword

The objective of this Scrutiny Panel was:

To review poverty in the town to ascertain whether it is a serious issue:

- Whether it is growing and more generally what are the trends (including migration)
- What are the causes of poverty locally?
- What can public services do in this time of austerity?
- What can other groups/individuals do to help?
- What the impact is, if any, is there on the economy, crime, health and education

The required outcomes being:

To make informed recommendations to all relevant parties on the most appropriate approaches to take to address the causes and mitigate the impact of poverty in Northampton.

The Scrutiny Panel was made up of Members from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: myself (Chair); Councillor Brian Sargeant (Vice Chair); Councillor Rufia Ashraf; together with other non-Executives Councillors Christopher Malpas, Lee Mason, Dennis Meredith and Beverley Mennell. County Councillor Winston Strachan was co-opted to the review.

A comprehensive review took place between May 2014 and March 2015. A wealth of background data and information was received by the Scrutiny Panel and a series of interviews with a number of key expert advisors were held. A number of organisations and community groups provided written information. Desktop research was undertaken by the Scrutiny Officer, the findings of which informed the review.

Information gathering was very important to this review so that the Scrutiny Panel could map who was most affected and receive details of the processes and systems currently in place to address the causes and mitigate the impact of poverty in Northampton. This enabled the Scrutiny Panel to devise its recommendations that will be considered by Cabinet later this year.

As part of the monitoring regime, Overview and Scrutiny will review this report six months after Cabinet has received it.

I would like to thank everyone who took part in this in-depth piece of work.



Councillor Elizabeth Gowen
Chair, Scrutiny Panel 2

Acknowledgements to all those who took part in the review:

- Councillors Brian Sargeant (Vice-Chair); Rufia Ashraf, Lee Mason, Christopher Malpas, Dennis Meredith, Beverley Mennell and County Councillor Winston Strachan (co-optee) who sat with me on this review
- Councillors Mary Markham, Cabinet Member for Housing, Alan Bottwood, Cabinet Member for Finance and Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning, Northampton Borough Council (NBC); Julie Seddon, Chair of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), Robin Bates, Head of Revenues and Benefits, Local Government Shared Services (LGSS), Matthew Steele, Benefits and Fraud Manager, LGSS, Sarah Hayle, Community Law, Martin Lord, Central and East Northants Citizens Advice Bureau, Dr Ali Akeem, Director of Public Health, Northamptonshire County Council, Nisha Meja, Chair, Northampton Inter Faith Forum, Dr Matthew Callender and Father Tim Curtis, University of Northampton, Matthew Torreson, Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire, for attending a meeting of the Scrutiny Panel and providing a response to the core questions
- Nationwide Building Society and Growing Together for providing written information to inform this Scrutiny review
- David Kennedy, Chief Executive, and Marion Goodman, Head of Customers and Culture, NBC, for their support to this Scrutiny review

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel was to review poverty in the town to ascertain whether it is a serious issue:

- Whether it is growing and more generally what are the trends (including migration)
- What are the causes of poverty locally?
- What can public services do in this time of austerity?
- What can other groups/individuals do to help?
- What the impact is, if any, is there on the economy, crime, health and education

The required outcomes being:

To make informed recommendations to all relevant parties on the most appropriate approaches to take to address the causes and mitigate the impact of poverty in Northampton.

Following approval of its work programme for 2014/2015, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to include a review entitled Poverty in the Town in its work for 2014/2015. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned Scrutiny Panel 2 to undertake the review. A comprehensive, in-depth review commenced in May 2014, concluding in March 2015.

A Scrutiny Panel was established comprising Councillor Elizabeth Gowen (Chair); Councillor Brian Sargeant (Vice Chair); Councillor Rufia Ashraf ; together with other non-Executives Councillors Christopher Malpas, Lee Mason and Beverley Mennell. County Councillor Winston Strachan, Chair, Environment, Development and Transport Scrutiny Committee, Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) was co-opted to the review.

A comprehensive, in-depth review commenced in May 2014, concluding in March 2015.

CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

A significant amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report. After gathering evidence the Scrutiny Panel established that: -

Definition of Poverty

6.1.1 The Scrutiny Panel noted that there is no one definition of poverty used in the UK and therefore felt it was important for its own definition of poverty to be agreed and used throughout this review:

- Have nothing set aside for emergencies
- Cannot replace broken goods or furniture
- Can't afford their children's school uniforms, or the cost of school trips
- Have no spare money for holidays, hobbies or leisure activities
- Can't afford to keep their homes warm
- Can't afford to participate in social activities and customs of their community

Statistical data and general trends

6.1.2 Evidence gathered highlighted that Northampton is no different to many large towns in the country, in that deprivation is present in a number of areas. As detailed in section 3.2.1 of this report, seven out of the 129 local "super output areas" in Northampton are in the top 10% most deprived, 27 in top 20%. These are in wards such as Castle, Spencer, Lumbertubs, Thorplands, St Davids, Delapre. These statistics are in relation to the old Borough wards. 66% of Northampton Borough Council (NBC) tenants are in receipt of full or partial housing benefit.

6.1.3 The Scrutiny Panel noted that there are 3.5 million children living in poverty in the UK (27 per cent of children). As at May 2013 there were 8,360 children (18.7%) in Northampton living in families in receipt of out of work benefits. As at 31 March 2013, long-term unemployed figures indicate that in Northampton 3,970 Job Seekers Allowance /Income Support claimants have been claiming benefits for at least three out of the preceding four years. In 2012, the number of households in fuel poverty in England was estimated at around 2.28 million, representing approximately 10.4 per cent of all English households. The East

Midlands had the second highest rate of fuel poverty (with a fuel poverty rate of 13%).

- 6.1.4 Evidence received detailed that Welfare Reform changes have greatly increased the number of customers who face a reduction of Housing Benefit and there has been a corresponding increase in Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) applications. The Scrutiny Panel realised that awards of DHP can be the difference between a tenant affording to pay their rent and thereby avoiding falling into arrears.
- 6.1.5 Evidence received demonstrated that some individuals and families on low incomes and/or in receipt of state benefits (working age) are struggling financially and in some cases this is leading to the accrual of debt. Reported factors being the impact of a series of Welfare Reforms, wage restrictions and the cost of living increase.
- 6.1.6 The overall Council Tax collection rate fell by 0.4 percentage points, only its second fall since its inception in 1991. Collection rates fell in 15% of Councils that introduced low minimum payments and in 63% of those with high minimum payments.
- 6.1.7 Statistics showed that employed claimants make up around 21% of housing benefit claimants compared to 11% five years ago. The number of Northampton households capped (total number of benefit) from 15 April 2013 to May 2014 was 135. 1,068 Northampton Social Rented Sector tenants are currently subject to a weekly reduction in their housing benefit. The average reduction equates to £16.10. In 2011/12 NBC made 333 Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) awards to 69 individual DHP applicants. In 2012/13 the number of DHP awards increased by 81% and in 2013/14 the increase [over 11/12] was 310%.

Initiatives in identifying and delivering solutions to tackle poverty in Northampton

- 6.1.8 Local Authorities, and other key Agencies, have a number of processes in place to assist people in poverty, such as advice and support, aimed at preventing debt as well as that designed to assist tenants who are already in arrears offered is by Housing Services, Northampton Borough Council. The advice and support is aimed at preventing debt as well as that designed to assist tenants who are already in arrears.
- 6.1.9 The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the fact that the Tenancy sign up process has recently been amended and is now undertaken within the one stop shop at the Guildhall.

- 6.1.10 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that work is complete on improving the energy efficiency of Council dwellings in St James and Semilong. Similar energy efficiency improvements are planned and costed in the Asset Management Strategy that Northampton Partnership Homes will be adopting.
- 6.1.11 The Scrutiny Panel felt that promoting the services of the Credit Union could help to prevent individuals obtaining loans with huge interest rates.
- 6.1.12 The Scrutiny Panel emphasised the need for people to be aware of the services and assistance available by service providers, Agencies and Charities.
- 6.1.13 During the review, the Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that Northampton Borough Council confirmed that it would ensure that all of its employees are paid at least the living wage. However, evidence detailed that an estimated 5.24 million people are being paid less than the living wage, up 400,000 in the past year (based on analysis by accountancy firm KPMG).

Economy, crime, health and education

- 6.1.14 The Scrutiny Panel concluded that it is difficult to establish if poverty is actually a main causal factor of crime within these areas without undertaking detailed analysis, utilising a wide range of data and demographic information. To date no specific analysis looking specifically at poverty and crime has been undertaken for Northampton.
- 6.1.15 The Scrutiny Panel realised that if people do not have the basic resources in life such as keeping warm, nutrition, access to physical activity, there is potential for social isolation. Poverty is a big agenda and there is a need to focus on the areas that make a difference to health and wellbeing.
- 6.1.16 People have lifestyle choices but choices are often limited when living in poverty; such as what to eat, keep warm and leisure activities; there is a need to look at where the Local Authority can intervene.
- 6.1.17 Living conditions, such as damp, can be a key concern; this is most important for the frail, elderly and young children.
- 6.1.18 Regarding the gap in life expectancy between the most affluent and those living in poverty, the Scrutiny Panel felt that education is key. For

example encouraging people, in particular men, to visit their GP to have regular health checks and stop smoking.

- 6.1.19 The evidence received highlighted that University education helps to raise the aspirations of the local economy; by having better school education outcomes and more University educated people in Northampton more high quality and high paying employers will be attracted to the town. The University of Northampton offers a number of vocational courses such as lift technology, computer gaming technology and waste management.
- 6.1.20 There is often a link between mental health issues and the ability to cope. For example, individuals who lack the ability to prioritise, organise and manage.
- 6.1.21 The number of young people not in education, training or work has decreased by 25% over the past three years.

Other Groups and Agencies

- 6.1.22 The majority of key Agencies know about each other's services and are able to make effective referrals. The Scrutiny Panel felt that this could be improved by an information hub being developed, virtual and physical, which could have a database of literature/information on relevant Agencies/services. The Scrutiny Panel considered that this could be very helpful for, not only Agencies wishing to make referrals, but could also be accessible for the public to find services they need.
- 6.1.23 The Scrutiny Panel highlighted the need for a strong referral network amongst local Agencies (statutory and voluntary). Signposting is often not always effective for people as they have too many places to visit and relay their situation to. An effective referral network allows full and specific referrals to be made and is less likely to result in the individual not accessing the services they need. Networking events and a robust framework for all Agencies to be clear about their services and access would be a useful tool.
- 6.1.24 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged the good work of Restore Northampton recognising the need to see where the Council could add value to the process. For example, how the Council could work together to inform people of the smaller charities in existence; in addition to the high profile ones; how they could donate and how information about the smaller charities could be disseminated; such as promoting the work of smaller scale charities in the Council's One Stop Shop and linking businesses with smaller charities. The Scrutiny Panel further felt that it

would be useful to make allotment holders aware of the Project and ask whether they could provide some support to the Restore Northampton project.

6.1.25 The Scrutiny Panel welcomed work that is currently being undertaken with Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) regarding a national awareness programme about cancers.

6.1.26 The Scrutiny Panel reiterated the three recommendations of the Scrutiny Review – Impact of the Welfare Reform Act, noting the link between these and mitigating the impact of poverty:

- Close links into and between the Voluntary Sector and Northampton Borough Council are promoted.
- Active promotion of the work of Voluntary Sector organisations, such as (Charity Link, Citizens Advice Bureau and Community Law) takes place on the Council's website, within the One Stop Shop and as part of outreach activities such as tenants' conferences.
- Service Level Agreements with Voluntary Sector organisations are explicit in relation to the necessity to provide support and advice to customers facing sanction.

Other Public Services

6.1.27 The Scrutiny Panel conveyed concerns regarding Universal Credit and the fact that the claimant would receive all of their benefits and be expected to budget. It highlighted the need for training on budget management.

6.1.28 It was felt that sanctions are a key issue to benefit claimants and there is a need for more awareness raising regarding sanctions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations: -

The purpose of this Scrutiny Panel was to review poverty in the town to ascertain whether it is a serious issue:

- Whether it growing and more generally what are the trends (including migration)
- What are the causes of poverty locally?
- What can public services do in this time of austerity?
- What can other groups/individuals do to help?
- What the impact is, if any, is there on the economy, crime, health and education

Scrutiny Panel 2 recommends to Cabinet:

- 7.1.1 The definition of poverty, as devised by the Scrutiny Panel (Poverty in the Town), is used by Northampton Borough Council:
- Have nothing set aside for emergencies
 - Cannot replace broken goods or furniture
 - Can't afford their children's school uniforms, or the cost of school trips
 - Have no spare money for holidays, hobbies or leisure activities
 - Can't afford to keep their homes warm
 - Can't afford to participate in social activities and customs of their community
- 7.1.2 Northampton Borough Council actively promotes of the work of Voluntary Sector organisations, such as Charity Link, Citizens Advice Bureau and Community Law via the Council's website, within the One Stop Shop, as part of outreach activities, such as tenants' conferences, and by having a regular information stand on the town's market.
- 7.1.3 Northampton Borough Council works with the Director of Health, Northamptonshire County Council, in the promotion of national health and wellbeing awareness campaigns in Council facilities such as the One Stop Shop and through links available on the Council's website.

- 7.1.4 Northampton Borough Council works with the Voluntary and Community Sector regarding the introduction of a strong referral network amongst Agencies.
- 7.1.5 Northampton Borough Council allotment holders are informed of the Restore Northampton Project and provided with details of how they can provide assistance to the Project.
- 7.1.6 Northampton Borough Council and Voluntary Impact Northampton work together to inform people of, and promote both the smaller charities and the high profile charities.
- 7.1.7 Northampton Borough Council promotes the work of smaller scale charities in the Council's One Stop Shop, through links on the Council's website and considers how it can link businesses with smaller charities.
- 7.1.8 Northampton Borough Council promotes the work of Northamptonshire Credit Union to encourage people to use it as an alternative to payday loans.
- 7.1.9 Northampton Partnership Homes is asked to provide budget management training and money advice (including information about avoiding and mitigating sanctions) for its tenants; ahead of the introduction of Universal Credit.
- 7.1.10 Northamptonshire Partnership Homes is asked to promote the work of Northamptonshire Credit Union to its tenants.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 7.1.11 A copy of the final report is sent to the Environment, Development and Transport Scrutiny Committee, Northamptonshire County Council.
- 7.1.12 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers commissioning a Scrutiny review on inequalities between estates and wards within the borough of Northampton.
- 7.1.13 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report in six months' time.

12NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny

Report of Scrutiny Panel 2 - Poverty in the Town

1 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel was to review poverty in the town to ascertain whether it is a serious issue:

- Whether it growing and more generally what are the trends (including migration)
- What are the causes of poverty locally?
- What can public services do in this time of austerity?
- What can other groups/individuals do to help?
- What the impact is, if any, is there on the economy, crime, health and education

1.2 A copy of the scope of the review is attached at Appendix A.

2 Context and Background

2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its work programming event in March 2014, agreed to include a review of poverty in the town. This was an issue that had been suggested by the public as an area for future Scrutiny review. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned Scrutiny Panel 2 to undertake the review. An in-depth review commenced in May 2014 and concluded in March 2015.

2.2 A Scrutiny Panel was established comprising Councillor Elizabeth Gowen (Chair); Councillor Brian Sargeant (Vice Chair); Councillors Rufia Ashraf, and Lee Mason; together with other non-Executives Councillors Dennis Meredith, Christopher Malpas and Beverley Mennell. County Councillor Winston Strachan, Chair Transport Scrutiny Committee, Northamptonshire County Council, (NCC), was co-opted to the review.

2.3 This review links to the Council's corporate priorities, particularly corporate priority 7 - promoting health and wellbeing and corporate priority 8 – responding to your needs.

2.4 The Scrutiny Panel established that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities:

- Background data, including:
 - Presentation to set the scene: To identify the prevalence of the problem locally
 - Relevant national background research papers, such as poverty and welfare strategies
 - Relevant findings from the Scrutiny Review: Impact of the Welfare Reform Act
 - Relevant Legislation
 - Relevant data, including relevant data such as payroll information, poverty indicators, activity costs, employment trends, demographics (national and local)
- Best practice and successful initiatives in Northampton and comparable Local Authorities
- Witness Evidence:

Internal

- Cabinet Member for Housing, Northampton Borough Council (NBC)
- Cabinet Member for Finance, NBC
- Head of Revenues and Benefits, LGSS
- Chair, Community Safety Partnership (CSP)
- Director of Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning, NBC

External

- Community Law
- Central and East Northants Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
- Community and Voluntary Sector- Voluntary Impact Northampton
- University of Northampton
- Nationwide Building Society
- Director of Public Health, Northamptonshire County Council (NCC)
- Northampton Inter Faith Forum
- Community Groups

2.5 The statistics collected as part of this review reveal what it is like to live on very limited income. Northampton is no different to many large towns in the country, in that deprivation is present in a number of areas. As detailed in section 3.2.1 of this report, 7 out of the 129 local “super output areas” in

Northampton are in the top 10% most deprived, 27 in top 20%. These are in wards such as Castle, Spencer, Lumbertubs, Thorplands, St Davids, Delapre. The data was compiled using the revised local child poverty indicator (that was formerly known as National Indicator 116).

- 2.6 In 2012, on average throughout the UK, one in five (20.2%) children were classified as below the poverty line (before housing costs). In some larger cities this rose to over 40%. By Local Authority, Northampton has 18% of children living in poverty; by Parliamentary constituency, Northampton North had 20% of children living in poverty and Northampton South 22%.

Definition of the poverty line

- 2.7 There is no one definition of poverty in the UK. A number of organisations, groups and charities have, however, produced and published their own definitions.
- 2.8 The definition of poverty, shown below was devised by the Scrutiny Panel and used throughout its review:
- Have nothing set aside for emergencies
 - Cannot replace broken goods or furniture
 - Can't afford their children's school uniforms, or the cost of school trips
 - Have no spare money for holidays, hobbies or leisure activities
 - Can't afford to keep their homes warm
 - Can't afford to participate in social activities and customs of their community

3 Evidence Collection

- 3.1 Evidence was collected from a variety of sources:

3.2 Background reports

- Executive Summary – “Poverty, Participation and Choice, the legacy of Peter Townsend” (2013) – Joseph Rowntree Foundation. A copy of the full report can be [located](#).
- Executive Summary – “Monitoring poverty and social exclusion” (2010) – Joseph Rowntree Foundation. A copy of the full report can be [located](#):
- [Summary](#) – “Poverty and problematic debt, what can social housing providers do?” (2013)

- Executive Summary – Department of Energy and Climate Change – “Annual Report on Fuel Poverty Statistics” (2013). A copy of the full report can be [located](#):
- Recommendations of the report: Child Poverty Action Group - “Local Authorities and child poverty balancing threats and opportunities” (2013). A copy of the full report can be [located](#).
- End Child Poverty – Child Poverty Map (2013) compiled by Matt Pedley and Donald Hirsch of the Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University. A copy of the full report can be [located](#).
- Executive Summary: The Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church, the Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church “The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty” (2013). The full report can be [located](#).
- Summary - The Money Advice Service – The Financial Capacity of the UK (2013). The full report can be [located](#)
- [Briefing note](#) – Joseph Rowntree Trust (JRT) – Policy Briefing: Universal Credit – How does Universal Credit help reduce poverty?”
- [Local Government Association](#) - ‘Tackling fuel poverty through local leadership (2013)
- Findings of the report of Scrutiny Panel 1, Northampton Borough Council (NBC) – [Impact of the Welfare Reform Act \(2014\)](#)

3.2.1 Background statistics

Latest National Statistics (at the time the review was undertaken)

- Average real terms disposable income:
 - Before housing costs (BHC): £440 per week
 - After housing costs (AHC): £374 per week
- Income inequality unchanged 2011/2012- 2012/2013
- 15% of individuals are in relative low income BHC
- 17% in absolute low income BHC, 23% AHC
- 13% of children are in ‘low income and material deprivation’ or ‘severe poverty’
- 15% of pensioners are in absolute low income
- An estimated 15.4% of households were in fuel poverty in 2011 (14.6% in England). This is higher than it was in 2006. Central Government has withdrawn a lot of financial support for fuel poverty

Northampton (at the time the review was undertaken)

- Average gross weekly pay for full-time workers by residence: £498 (Great Britain £518)
- 22.6% of children living in poverty (England 21.8%). 1:8 children are living in low income and material deprivation or severe poverty
- Long term unemployment 9.5/1,000 working age population (England 10.1/1,000)
- 18% of older people in deprivation (England 18.1%)
- 14% are in income deprivation (England 14.7%)
- Northampton ranks 119th of 326 local authority areas (1st being most deprived)
- 7 out of the 129 local “super output areas” in Northampton are in the top 10% most deprived, 27 in top 20%. These are in wards such as Castle, Spencer, Lumbertubs, Thorplands, St Davids, Delapre
- As of June 2014, 4,035 people (2.9%) in Northampton were claiming Job Seekers Allowance
- Historically, employment in Northampton before the recession was around 2.5%
- Job density measures the level of jobs per resident aged 16-64. For example, a job density of 1.0 would mean that there is one job for every resident aged 16-64. In Northampton there is a job ratio of 1; Nottingham has the same ratio. For Leicester it is 0.78 and Derby 0.8
- 13,693 people (12%) in Northampton are claiming both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction; 2,942 are claiming housing benefit only and 4,371 people in Northampton are Council Tax Reduction Claimants
- Rent arrears have been falling annually and are at their lowest for more than 11 years. 7% of tenants have arrears of £500 or more
- In 2013/14, around 3,500 food parcels were issued. The top three reasons given for needing this support are:
 - Benefit problems
 - Unemployment
 - Debt

3.2.2 Relevant Legislation

Child Poverty Act 2010

3.2.2.1 The reported purpose of the Child Poverty Act 2010 is to define success in eradicating child poverty and create a framework to monitor progress at a national and local level.

3.2.2.2 The Act:

- Places a duty on the Secretary of State to meet four child poverty targets by 2020/21, based on a relative low income measure, a low income measure fixed in real terms, a combined low income and material deprivation measure, and a 'persistent poverty' measure
- Requires central Government to publish a Child Poverty Strategy, which must be revised every three years, setting out policies to meet the targets
- Requires Scottish and Northern Irish ministers to publish child poverty strategies (the National Assembly for Wales has enacted separate legislation imposing corresponding duties on Ministers in Wales)
- Establishes a Child Poverty Commission to provide advice on strategies
- Requires central Government to publish annual progress reports
- Places duties on local authorities and other 'delivery partners' in England to work together to tackle child poverty, conduct a local needs assessment, produce a child poverty strategy and take child poverty into account in the production and revision of their Sustainable Communities Strategies

3.2.2.3 Four Targets for 2020:

- Relative poverty – to reduce the proportion of children who live in relative low income (in families with income below 60 per cent of the median) to less than 10 per cent
- Combined low income and material deprivation – to reduce the proportion of children who live in material deprivation and have a low income to less than 5 per cent

- Persistent poverty – to reduce the proportion of children that experience long periods of relative poverty, with the specific target to be set at a later date; and
- ‘Absolute’ poverty – to reduce the proportion of children who live below an income threshold fixed in real terms to less than 5 per cent.

Child Poverty Strategy 2014-2017

3.2.2.4 The first Child Poverty Strategy was published on 5 April 2011. It set out the framework to tackle child poverty from 2011-2014 and ending child poverty by 2020. The Government ran consultation on the Child Poverty Strategy 2014-2017 from 27 February - 22 May 2014. The second Strategy was then published in June 2014. The Strategy sets out the Government’s plans for reducing child poverty and the root causes of poverty, including worklessness, low earnings and educational failure, towards its goal of ending child poverty by 2020. The full Strategy can be [located](#).

3.3 Core questions

3.3.1 The Scrutiny Panel devised a series of core questions that it put to key witnesses over a cycle of meetings (Copy at Appendix B).

3.3.2 Key witnesses provided a response to these core questions at the meetings of the Scrutiny Panel held on 24 November 2014, 8 January 2015 and 12 February 2015.

3.3.3 Salient points of evidence:

Cabinet Member for Housing, Northampton Borough Council (NBC)

- The Council produced an Affordable Warmth Strategy (AWS) 2011-2014 which was approved by Cabinet on 23 November 2011. This was replaced by the Housing Strategy 2013-2016 which was an amalgamation of several strategies (including the AWS). The Housing Strategy 2013-2016 was approved by Cabinet on 9 October 2013.
- Work is complete on improving the energy efficiency of Council dwellings in St James’ and Semilong. Similar energy efficiency improvements are planned and costed in the Asset Management Strategy that Northampton Partnership Homes will be adopting.
- Advice and support is aimed at preventing debt as well as that designed to assist tenants who are already in arrears.

New Tenant Workshops

- Once a Tenancy has been allocated, but before the tenant is signed up, they are invited to a New Tenant Workshop. The purpose of the workshop is to provide information and advice aimed at preparing the tenant for the challenges and responsibilities that go with managing their own home. This includes advice on money management, welfare benefits and paying bills, including rent and Council tax.

Tenancy Sign Up

- The Tenancy sign up process has recently been amended and is now undertaken within the one stop shop at the Guildhall. Both the Housing Officer and Rent Income Officer will meet the new tenant at sign up. The Rent Income Officer will take the opportunity to discuss the tenant's income and expenditure, rent payments, methods of payment and promote payment by direct debit. In circumstances where the tenant is claiming benefits, a housing benefit and council tax reduction application will be taken to ensure Housing Benefit and Council Tax Refund is in payment from the start of the tenancy. The approach is designed to minimise the possibility of any financial difficulty at the start of the tenancy. The opportunity is also taken to promote Citizens Account which allows customers to manage their rent and Council tax accounts on-line.

New Tenant Visit

- Within four weeks of a Tenancy commencing the Housing Officer will undertake a home visit. The purpose of the visit is to ensure the new tenant is settling into their new home and will include checking there are no money problems or difficulty with rent and Council tax payments.

Quarterly Statement

- All tenants receive a quarterly rent statement which includes details of rent charges, payments made and the account balance. This assists tenants in tracking what they have paid and what is due.

Housing Benefit Liaison

- 66% of tenants are in receipt of full or partial housing benefit. Debt can occur when benefit applications are delayed or tenants experience a change in circumstances. Developing an excellent working relationship with the Housing Benefit Team has been essential to ensure that wherever possible benefit entitlement is maximised. The Income and

Rent Accounting Team hold regular liaison meetings with the Housing Benefit Team both at an operational and strategic level.

- The Income Team has a dedicated Benefits Liaison Officer who provides specialist Housing Benefit advice to tenants and liaises directly with Housing Benefit Officers on complex individual cases.

Under Occupation

- Advice and support is available to those who may be experiencing difficulty with rent payments because of a reduction in Housing Benefit due to under-occupation. Specifically this will include money management advice for those who choose to stay and pay or the option of downsizing for those seeking smaller accommodation.
- Those wishing to downsize are given emergency priority on the housing waiting list thereby ensuring they have the maximum opportunity to secure a smaller home. A downsizing payment of £500 is available to assist with the cost of moving, however, where a tenant has already accrued arrears some or all of the downsizing payment can be used to offset the debt.

Basic Debt Advice

- All Rent Income Officers are able to provide tenants with basic debt advice. This will include looking at income and expenditure, identifying opportunities for maximising income and reducing expenditure and ensuring any rent debt repayment arrangements are based on the individual's financial situation.

Specialist Debt Advice

- Where more special debt advice is needed, for example due to a multiple debt situation or where assistance is required to negotiate with creditors referrals are made to either, the Council's in house Debt Counselling Team, Community Law Service or Citizens Advice Bureau.
- The Rent Income Team will in the first instance refer to the Council's Debt Counselling Team. New referral arrangements have been agreed and Rent Income Officers are now able to book an appointment for a tenant directly into the Debt Counselling Diary. This makes for a seamless service, where by the customer can immediately be provided with an appointment date and will receive advice at the earliest opportunity. This maximises the opportunity for a successful outcome.

Signposting

- Letters and Notices used in the rent recovery process include signposting information for:
 - National Debt-line
 - The Money Advice Service
 - CAB
 - Community Law Service

Self Help Guide

- The Rent Income service has produced a self-help guide which can be provided to any tenant. The guide gives advice about money management and includes templates for calculating household income and expenditure. Additionally it provides example letters for use when negotiating repayments with creditors.

NBC website

- The Council's website includes some advice for those who fall into arrears, with the primary message being; contact us to discuss any difficulties with payments.

Tenant Training

- The Customer Engagement, Team within Landlord Services, run a number of free tenant training courses. These include a course on Money Management and Budgeting. This is a short two hour course open to all tenants but booked on a first come first served basis. There are four money management courses booked to run before the end of December 2014, each course can accommodate up to 20 people.

Court duty worker scheme

- The Community Law Service provide on the day representation at the County Court for people attending repossession hearings who do not have a representative.
- If individuals find themselves in arrears with their priority debts, i.e. mortgage or rent, Housing Services would offer those individuals guidance and support in the following ways:
 - a) Complete and income and expenditure form to get a record of their financial situation

- b) Liaise with their rent officer/mortgage letter in the attempt to make an agreeable offer of payment to ensure that they can avoid homelessness if and where possible.
- c) Represent clients at court (those who are not NBC tenants due to conflict of interest)
- d) Make payment arrangements with other creditors to provide a holistic approach to the debt situation
- e) Liaise with housing benefit as and when required to ensure that clients getting their full entitlement and also apply for Discretionary Housing Payments to help towards any shortfall in housing benefit
- f) Identify any discounts or exemptions for their Council tax accounts
- g) Refer to Community Law Service for Debt Relief Orders or Bankruptcy if no other option is available.
- h) Give them support and advice to move home if it is not financially sustainable for them to continue to live in their current property

**Cabinet Member for Finance, Northampton Borough Council (NBC),
Head of Revenues and Benefits, Local Government Shared Services (LGSS)**

- There is evidence that some individuals and families on low incomes and/or in receipt of state benefits (working age) are struggling financially and in some cases this is leading to the accrual of debt - significant factors being the impact of a series of welfare reforms, wage restrictions and the cost of living increase.
- Some National trend data:
 - There are 3.5 million children living in poverty in the UK today (27 per cent of children).
 - As at May 2013 there were 8,360 children (18.7%) in Northampton living in families in receipt of out of work benefits as at May 2013.
 - Latest long term unemployed figures (as at 31 March 2013) indicate that in Northampton 3,970 JSA/IS claimants have been claiming benefits for at least three out of the preceding four years.
 - In 2012, the number of households in fuel poverty in England was estimated at around 2.28 million,

representing approximately 10.4 per cent of all English households. The East Midlands had the second highest rate of fuel poverty (with a fuel poverty rate of 13%).

- Age UK report that up to 390,000 older people in poverty could have claimed an average of £48 per week in Housing Benefit last year. The report also found that there were 1.6 million older people living in poverty in the UK last year and 900,000 are living in severe poverty. Councils that made the deepest cuts to Council tax support are the most likely to see the steepest increases in arrears and administration costs according to research carried out by the New Policy Institute, which researches poverty, housing and economic issues. The report said Council tax arrears had risen by £145m to £836m since the abolition of the national Council Tax Benefit (CTB) Scheme in 2013, while related court and administration costs rose by £24m to £233m. Arrears increased by at least a quarter in 84% of Councils with a high minimum payment, but rose at this rate in only 32% of Councils with a low minimum payment.
 - The overall Council tax collection rate fell by 0.4 percentage points, only its second fall since its inception in 1991. Collection rates fell in 15% of Councils that introduced low minimum payments and in 63% of those with high minimum payments. According to the NPI's report: *"The size of these changes was clearly linked to the level of minimum payment: higher minimum payments were associated with bigger increases in arrears and court costs and a falling collection rate. Our research shows that the bigger the cut in Council tax support, the bigger the fall [in collection rates] tended to be. Councils should consider the implications for the collection rate when setting council tax support for next April."*
 - NBC is proposing to reduce Council tax support in 2015/16 by a further 5-10%.
- From a national state benefit perspective the causes of poverty locally are:
 - The annual rise of most working-age welfare payments and tax credits has been limited to 1% in 2014/15 and

2015/2016 instead of, as previously was the case, being linked to inflation (the Consumer Price Index). This also means that rental inflation is no longer taken into account in determining Local Housing Allowance rates, increasing the gap between rent levels and maximum awards.

- Nationally, the number of housing benefit claimants in work has more than doubled in five years; there were 1,058,569 housing benefit claimants in work in May 2014, compared to 485,609 in May 2009. Employed claimants now make up around 21% of housing benefit claimants compared to just 11% five years ago. The number of middle-income earners relying on housing benefit has also risen by 350,000 since 2008. National Housing Federation (NHF) research show that middle-income households earning between £20,000 and £30,000 a year accounted for two-thirds of all new housing benefit claims during the past six years.
- Low pay - An estimated 5.24m people are being paid less than the living wage - up 400,000 in the past year (based on analysis by accountancy firm KPMG). Their recent report indicates that 21% of employees are paid less than the hourly rate aimed at covering the basic cost of living, up from 20% a year ago. KPMG says its findings have largely been driven by steep increases in the cost of living, combined with slow growth in median hourly wages. Income tax is also likely to fall short of the government's target for this financial year despite record employment, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has warned.
- Community care grants and crisis loans were replaced by localised support from April 2013 and the funding arrangement in respect of local welfare provision for 2015 and beyond is currently out for consultation. There has been a continued demand for food from the Northampton Food Bank and the Trussell Trust has also recently commenced Food Bank operations within the Northampton area.

- From a local perspective:
 - A cap on the total amount of benefit that working-age households can receive has been introduced so that, broadly, households on out-of-work benefits will no longer receive more in welfare payments than the average weekly wage for working households. If affected, a household's Housing Benefit entitlement will be reduced so that the total amount of benefit received is no longer higher than the cap level.
 - The number of Northampton households capped from 15 April 2013 to May 2014 was 135 (69 up to £50, 42 between £50.01 and £100 and 18 between £100.01).
 - In April 2013 the removal of the spare room subsidy (RSRS) came into effect. This policy applies to working age social rented sector (SRS) housing benefit claimants (pensioner households are exempt). Where claimants are deemed to occupy more bedrooms than they need, as defined by the social sector size criteria, they are subject to a weekly reduction in their housing benefit.
 - 1068 Northampton SRS tenants are currently subject to a weekly reduction in their housing benefit (901 tenants have had a 14% reduction applied and 167 tenants face a 25% reduction). The average reduction = £16.10 – Max reduction = £32.53; Min = £5.03.
 - The Government provides some funding for local authorities, in the form of a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) budget to help support Housing Benefit claimants who are continuing to adjust to the welfare reforms, such as the removal of the spare room subsidy and the benefit cap.
 - In 2011/12 NBC made 333 DHP awards to 69 individual DHP applicants. In 2012/13 the number of DHP wards increased by 81% and in 2013/14 the increase [over 11/12] was 310%. The DHP fund provided by Central Government has also increased in line with this demand.
 - In Northampton, the number of housing benefit claimants in work has increased by 16.29% over the past two years:

| | Oct-12 | Oct-13 | Oct-14 |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Rent Rebate Earners - Working Age | 1102 | 1129 | 1229 |
| Rent Allowance Earners - Working Age | 2421 | 2700 | 2853 |
| Rent Rebate Earners - Elderly | 63 | 62 | 62 |
| Rent Allowance Earners - Elderly | 54 | 65 | 89 |
| Total Number of Earners | 3640 | 3956 | 4233 |
| Annual % Increase | | 8.68% | 7.00% |
| % Increase in 24 months | | | 16.29% |

- In Northampton, Council Tax outstanding arrears for 2012/13 were £2,386,749.09 and, following the introduction of LCTR in 2013/14, increased to £2,766,800.58 - a rise of 15.92%. Costs (summons issue) have increased from £246,994.87 to £351,432.98 – a rise of 42.28%. This compares with a drop of 15.43% the previous year. The overall collection rate for 2013/14 was down by 0.36%. Some of this increase in outstanding arrear will be reflective of the decisions made in year 1 of CTRS not to summons due to small balances, we added an extra contact point to remind those behind with payments and due to the success of this operation have continued to do this into 2014/15.
- Welfare Reform changes have greatly increased the number of customers who face a reduction of Housing Benefit and there has been a corresponding increase in Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) applications. DHPs are a very important source of assistance for Housing Benefit claimants to help mitigate the impacts of welfare benefit reform. Awards of DHP can therefore be the difference between a tenant affording to pay their rent and thereby avoiding falling into arrears. They are therefore a key tool in helping tenants retain their tenancies and preventing homelessness. LGSS is committed to promoting the availability of DHPs on behalf of the Council and works with all interested parties including both voluntary and statutory

organisations, to achieve this. In particular, close working relationships have been developed with, for example, Social Sector Landlords, the CAB and the Community Law Service so that these organisations can reach out to those tenants who are impacted by the Welfare Reforms with further advice and information on the support options available to them. There has been a significant increase in DHP awards to help people sustain their tenancies.

- Council tax recovery now includes a further contact point before summons to encourage payment before the need to impose summons costs which can double the outstanding debt.
- LGSS is working closely with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in preparation for the roll out of Universal Credit in 2015. The aim is to establish a partnership between the local Job Centre and NBC, which will look at the best way to prepare claimants for work, help them with online access and digital support and to equip them to manage their finances on a monthly basis. It is envisaged that the partnership will also work with third sector organisations, voluntary groups and social landlords to deliver support to claimants.
- The One Stop Shop has and continues to bring partner organisations into the Guildhall to provide direct access to their services. Where co-location isn't available we ensure we have good links and referral arrangement to support a good customer experience.
- The Council, through Housing Money Advice, supports financial hardship and it has close links with the Citizen's Advice Bureau and Community Law Service who also provide these services. More recently the Credit Union has been located in the One Stop Shop at NBC to provide assistance with budgeting, accounts and financial advice.
- The Council is able to award Council Tax discretionary discounts for customers experiencing severe financial hardship. The Council must be satisfied that non-payment was not due to wilful refusal or culpable neglect to pay the tax.

Chair, Community Safety Partnership (CSP)

- Poverty is often identified as one of the causes of crime. The five priority locations for crime that the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has identified for 2014/2015 also feature within the top 20% of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation nationally.

- It is difficult to establish if poverty is actually a main causal factor of crime within these areas without undertaking detailed analysis, utilising a wide range of data and demographic information.
- To date, no specific analysis looking specifically at poverty and crime has been undertaken for Northampton.
- There are key recorded crime types that would be included in any analysis undertaken that could provide an early indication. These are namely Shoplifting, Serious Acquisitive Crime (SAC) (burglary, vehicle crime and robbery) and violent crime. For 2013/2014 all three crime types showed a reduction in crime levels in Northampton. This reduction has continued into 2014/2015 for both shoplifting and SAC. Violent Crime has seen a significant increase, but this has mainly been due to a change in recording, that has seen an increase for most areas nationally.
- Good partnership working is key to achieving positive results for communities. CSP “Weeks of Action” are held in the five priority locations. During those weeks a range of activities take place which include engagement with the community, providing advice support and information on a wide range of topics and sign posting to relevant support Agencies.

Director of Public Health, Northampton

- The [written evidence](#) detailed the consequences of social deprivation on people’s health and wellbeing.
- Life expectancy between the most affluent to those living in poverty has a gap of 11 years for men and six for women. The main diseases contributing to the life expectancy gap are cardiovascular and respiratory disease; smoking is the main cause of both diseases.
- Promoting exercise such as walking would be useful together with approaches to healthy eating.
- Men are more predisposed to cardio vascular disease than women as women are protected by oestrogen until the menopause.
- People’s lifestyle choices can often drive cardiovascular, respiratory diseases and mental wellbeing. There is a need to ensure people are accessing services such as help with giving up smoking. Helping people to give up smoking is a key priority. There is a need to educate people about the symptoms of these diseases and look to see what can be done to ensure early diagnosis.
- There is an issue with men accessing medical advice and services, which needs to be addressed.

- A local clinic has implemented a new programme to encourage health checks; this is a way of engaging with people who are at risk but did not realise so. Other initiatives, such as smoking cessation are also in place.
- Budgets need to be allocated appropriately; for example to Children's Centres based on need. Funding needs to be allocated on a priority basis.
- Corby and Northampton are the towns with the biggest need in the county.
- Work is currently being undertaken with CCGs regarding a national awareness programme about cancers. Northamptonshire has good uptake for bowel cancer screening.
- The purpose of the winter fuel supplement is to decrease cardiovascular disease by keeping the environment warm to prevent heart attacks and strokes. The heart has to work harder in the cold weather which brings on heart attacks and strokes in those people who already have unhealthy arteries.
- Councils are already doing a lot in respect of health improvement but by coordinating efforts, avoiding duplication and doing things at scale then their work would be even more effective.
- People can still eat healthily on a low budget and it does not cost money to keep physically active.

Community Law, Northampton

- Demand on the services of Community Law (CLS) is at its higher level with the longest waiting lists CLS has ever had.
- 23% of all clients who contact CLS for debt advice cite loss of employment/reduced hours/low wages as the reason they are in debt, 19% cite ill health and 10% cite a relationship breakdown.
- Resources must be focused to assist those most in need. For example, vulnerable people in crisis must have some way of accessing assistance. With the abolition of the Crisis Loan scheme from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), the Local Welfare Assistance scheme has been the only real help to people in crisis who have nowhere else to turn. Funding for this has been removed. Cessation of these schemes will most likely lead to extra pressures on NHS services and/or other statutory services, ultimately leading to additional costs to public funds, rather than saving money. People would be forced to turn to statutory services for support; they will become ill/experience deterioration in their health. For many, they would have no choice but to use high cost doorstep lenders (i.e. Loan sharks) or payday loan companies to get money just to meet the most basic of needs for

themselves and their families, entering them into the spiral of debt which is extremely difficult to break out from.

- CLS is faced with no additional funding from Local Authorities. It is up to each Authority to decide if it would continue.
- Food banks have limited resources to provide food, many limit the number of visits people can make to them. These are not a long term option for people to use.
- One of CLS' main aims is to support vulnerable client groups. CLS offers an holistic approach to dealing with client's situations and sees all cases through to conclusion' with the client having their own dedicated advisor throughout. All people seeking advice from CLS' service, either directly or through referral, are assessed and advised by specialist advisors.
- In Northampton CLS' services include:
 - Drop in sessions staffed by Specialist advisors at our Advice Shop in Giles Street
 - Appointments at our advice centre in Hazelwood Road
 - Outreach sessions at the Bangladeshi Gateway Centre, Northamptonshire Carers,
 - Home visits for housebound people
 - Telephone advice by specialist advisors
 - Advice via email
- In Northamptonshire, funding has been used to set up a number of schemes, as well as investing in existing schemes in order to make them more sustainable. The key ongoing schemes are:
 - Sustaining Independent Living Scheme
 - Emergency Fuel Scheme
 - Food banks
- CLS employs 24 F/T Specialist Advisors, including two solicitors who provide specialist advice, casework and Court/Tribunal representation in the social welfare areas of Welfare Benefits, debt, Housing, Immigration and Employment Law. CLS provides Energy Saving advice and administers the Emergency Fuel Payment Scheme. CLS offers consultancy services and has an established Training Service offering a programme of courses for all levels of skill at its offices or in-house for organisations. CLS' team of specialist advisors provides a range of advice to people experiencing poverty, to mitigate the effects:
 - Income maximisation

- Debt advice
- Energy advice
- housing advice

- CLS delivers the Money Advice Service's debt advice service provision in Northamptonshire, leads on the County Council Advice Services contract and is the lead Agency for the Big Lottery Fund Advice Services Development Project in Northampton.
- It is essential that there is a strong referral network amongst local Agencies (statutory and voluntary). Signposting is often not effective for people as they have too many places to find and too many times to tell their story. An effective referral network allows full and specific referrals to be made and is less likely to result in the individual not accessing the services they need. Networking events and a robust framework for all Agencies to be clear about their services and access is necessary.
- Following on from the success of Northamptonshire Energy Saving Service, CLS has been awarded funding from the British Gas Energy Trust to work with vulnerable clients who are experiencing fuel poverty.
- CLS has secured very positive links with Northampton Community Mental Health Teams and several GP practices in the town. CLS holds outreach advice sessions and offering home visits to those who require them.
- CLS believes most key Agencies know about each other's services and are able to make effective referrals. This could always be improved by an information hub being developed, virtual and physical, which could have a database of literature/information on relevant Agencies/services.
- Libraries offer free internet access on a Friday (available at other times for a small charge). The internet is an excellent way to obtain information but is not suitable for everyone.
- Current resources limit the amount of marketing/publicity CLS can do.
- Poverty itself is also likely to be a barrier to people accessing services: they may have no money to travel, be in poor health so struggle to leave their home; feel a stigma etc.
- CLS' Housing Advice team is funded through Northamptonshire County Council's Advice Services Contract and the Legal Aid Agency. CLS runs the Legal Aid Agency's Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme at the county court and attends every court repossession hearing to offer representation and ongoing casework. CLS has appointments available throughout the week at its offices for people to get advice on their housing issues. The last annual figures show CLS provided representation to 912 people in respect of rent/mortgage arrears through our housing department alone. 1,376 people were provided with housing advice.

- CLS' specialist debt advisors also provide advice and casework for people who have arrears with their mortgage/rent. Last year CLS' Housing and Debt departments managed £34,650,139 of debt with clients. Of this £4,238,595 was in respect of rent/mortgage/secured debt arrears.

Central and East Northants Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB)

- Statistical data and advice trends has its limitations
- There has been an increase in the statistics in relation to enquiries regarding employment
- Central and East Northants CAB insights (and those indicative of "poverty") are:
 - Increases over time of "issues" raised by clients which are likely to be indicative of poverty:
 - i. Sanctions
 - ii. Debt issues where "priority debts" sit within the context of low income
 - iii. Referrals to food banks and other emergency provision
- Anecdotal evidence – based on the narrative of clients as documented by advisers where we do not yet have sufficient data to support this, or CAB's statistical insights are not sophisticated enough to confirm this.
- Trends in the analysis of "income and expenditure" carried out as part and parcel of debt advice
- There has been a 23% increase in the incidence of sanctions
- There has been a 49% increase in the number of referrals CAB has made to food banks
- Council Tax arrears issues and Bailiff issues have increased by 21%
- Anecdotal evidence of issues giving rise to poverty which CAB is unable to demonstrate statistically:
 - i. Changes in benefit rules relating to migrant workers
 - ii. Non-payment of wages by employers
 - iii. Transport costs for those newly employed – especially in outlying districts
- There is plenty of evidence to suggest that poverty nationally has been on the increase and that welfare reform, changing labour market conditions, and wider changes in the economy are key drivers. Northampton should be no

different. Whilst it is difficult to draw conclusions particular to Northampton from our own data and insight CAB suspects that a comparatively low wage/low skill labour force along with a labour market with a high prevalence of employers which makes use of flexible working practices (warehousing, customer services, distribution) would give rise to greater prevalence of poverty (both cyclical and structural) within the working population.

- The impact of Welfare Reform is unlikely to be greater or lesser than in other areas however, the manner in which Universal Credit is introduced – which presents some opportunities to improve the situation – can be significantly influenced by the Borough Council as can the “localized” elements of the welfare benefit system – Council Tax Support, Discretionary Housing Payments, and Local Welfare assistance
- Through this Scrutiny Panel, seek clarification from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) of the impact of sanctions as they apply to Northampton
- Invest properly in the partnership building necessary to provide a borough wide response to the introduction of Universal Credit
- In respect to Sanctions, support or encourage Northampton Partnership Homes and other social housing providers (as a minimum) to do more to raise awareness amongst their tenants of how to avoid sanctions. In other words, despite the best intentions of government policy ensure that Northampton has the lowest level of sanctions
- Ensure Council Tax Support levels are kept as high as possible as the end of Council Tax Support has been a key driver behind council tax arrears/bailiff action and potentially the use of payday lenders
- Ensure the continued funding of the provision of independent advice as a key service able to ameliorate the impact of poverty

Community and Voluntary Sector (VCS)

Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire collated a response to the core questions of the Scrutiny Panel from a variety of community and voluntary sector organisations. Salient points:

- Poverty is increasing, due to issues such as zero hours contracts and sanctions.
- Often people have not been taught how to budget.
- Door step lenders and high interest loan companies are a particular cause for concern
- The Credit Union is seeing more of its loans being lent to ‘high risk’ customers which is a clear indicator of financial hardship

- The introduction of Universal Credit is a cause of real concern to VCS organisations, as the infrastructure needed to support such a radical change in the way benefits are paid is not in place
- Regarding the living wage, responders suggested that this should include contractors to the Borough Council too.
- Increased poverty is leading to an increase in mental health issues/depression and substance misuse/smoking/drinking. This then leads to an increase in anti-social behaviour, crime and interpersonal violence.
- Restore Northampton leads on a food bank and allotment project. It also offers a money advice service together with advice on budgeting.
- The allotment project provides vegetables for stews and stew packs. However, Restore Northampton does not currently have the facilities to store fresh produce for up to a week. The project provides education to people on how to use fresh produce.
- The project also assists people moving from refuges and ex-offenders. Assistance includes skills to help them make their accommodation a home
- Funding from Northamptonshire County Council has assisted the project
- The project has helped 3,750 households in Northampton. These being people categorised as being in absolute crisis and living in complete poverty
- Poverty is increasing. There is a lot of “working poor”
- Restore Northampton works with 80 referral Agencies in the town

Northampton Interfaith Forum

- The Northampton Inter Faith Forum comprises seven faiths:
 - Baha'i
 - Buddhist
 - Christian
 - Hindu
 - Islam
 - Jewish
 - Sikh
- The Forum has strong links with the seven faiths
- A number of the faiths offer support, for example, the Sikh faith provides food for the elderly on Sundays
- The faith groups offer places of worship, friendship and support
- The Forum, itself, offers support and advice and creates an awareness of poverty and identifies the causes. If a member of the Forum presents with, for example, mortgage arrears they are advised to contact the lender at the earliest opportunity

University of Northampton

- What is apparent in Northampton town is that an increase in the acute evidence for poverty has been widely reported. The long-term, structural problems are hidden and concentrated in pockets of severe deprivation which is not adequately reflected in the ward-level statistics. The symptoms of this poverty include:
 - a. Growth in demand for food banks
 - b. Increase in partial or full homelessness
 - c. The sanctioning of welfare claimants
 - d. Widespread reduction in finance for third sector organizations, a shift to larger scale contracting and to 'venture/social capital' ahead of the sector's ability to appropriately react
 - e. The roll- back of public services, such as the reduction of police officers, the closure of fire stations, reduction in road maintenance and switching-off of street lights
- Data is from 2010 and the next round of data to be published is late 2015, after the Scrutiny Panel has concluded its review
- The Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2010 data indicate that 7 LSOA (Local Super Output Areas) are in the top 10% most deprived LSOAs in England (an increase from 6 LSOAs in 2007):
 - Castle x2;
 - Spencer;
 - East Field;
 - St James;
 - Billing;
 - Lumbertubs
- The highest concentrations of:
 - Income Deprivation is in Kings Heath, Spencer and Brookside.
 - Child deprivation: Kings Heath; Spencer; Brookside and Talavera.
 - Unemployment is in Kings Heath; Spencer; Brookside; Talavera and Semilong.

- Long term unemployment is in Kings Heath; Spencer; Brookside; Talavera; St Davids; and Semilong.
 - Overcrowding is in Kings Heath; St James; Semilong; Castle and Brookside.
 - Multiple deprivation is in Kings Health, Spencer; Semilong, Castle and St Davids.
- The root causes of the chronic poverty, however, are the result of long term structural weaknesses and contradictions in a county that is relatively wealthy at a county level but contains significant pockets of extreme, invisible, deprivation, and have been consistently identified in national indices of multiple deprivations for decades.
 - Better use of existing data and improvement of services evaluation data:
 - Restructuring to provide services through private or social enterprise is not automatically a panacea
 - Better planning and design of the interaction between services to reduce demand
 - Better use of existing data and improvement of services evaluation data
 - Restructuring to provide services through private or social enterprise is not automatically a panacea
 - Better planning and design of the interaction between services to reduce demand
 - Insist on reducing the gap between its highest paid and lowest paid employees (as well as in its subcontracting bodies), and rebalance spending away from management towards a Living Wage policy
 - Introduce 'demand targets' to reduce demand for services, through better interaction and co-ordination between services. Co-ordinating targets and outcomes will reduce the amount of service activity that is foisted on other public services
 - Providing constructive alternatives to zero hours contracting and ensuring that casualisation is not allowed in the Council's supply chain
 - One community health trust discovered that less than 1 per cent of demand was resolved at the first point of contact", data from the Vanguard/Locality report of 2015 <http://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Locality-Report-Diseconomies-web-version.pdf> Page 15.

- The University bring 14,000 students to the town each year, each spending approximately £20,000 per annum into the local economy.
- A proportion of these students are 'studying poor', i.e. working part-time whilst often trying to study full-time.
- Students in particular are likely to encounter at least temporary poverty during their studies. The University of Northampton is actively tackling this
- The University works with citizens and community groups through its students to tackle poverty
- The University of Northampton has developed a strategic plan for 2015 – 2020 that includes a commitment to delivering social impact through its operations and initiatives. For example, we have targets for delivering social impact through our procurement activities. The largest single initiative, in financial terms, the University is taking is the development of the new Waterside campus. We have built social impact criteria into the scoring scheme for the tender. The winning contractor(s) will have a contract that links their delivery of the social impact in their tender to payment. This initiative gives the University and NBC the opportunity to work together to tackle poverty in certain sections of the community
- The interplay between poverty, inequality and crime, health and educational outcomes
- Poverty impacts on children at many levels in the short and long term and therefore it then impacts on society and economy and growth later on as well (increased social and health costs and decrease in economic power and revenues).
- There have been numerous reports that have outlined connections between poverty and health. The Marmot (2010) is a critical policy driver in England; providing policy objectives for local authorities and healthcare providers.
- Data extracted from the Public Health Outcomes Framework demonstrate a wide gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived
- Partnership working is not a panacea; they require management and closely monitored contractual relationships

Nationwide Building Society, Northampton

- Nationwide Building Society, Northampton advised that so far as support for those who find themselves in arrears, Nationwide Building Society has some really helpful guides on nationwide.co.uk covering money worries and managing debts Dealing With Money Worries & Troubles | Nationwide . These can help anyone in debt, not just Nationwide customers.
- If someone is in arrears, or likely to be, then they should contact their lender to talk through the options available. Where support is needed, for example

they have multiple debts or need help with benefits, then Nationwide Building Society would signpost to one of the free providers of money advice, such as StepChange, or the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). Nationwide Building Society may also suggest looking at the Money Advice Service website that has a lot of useful information Free & impartial money advice, set up by government - Money Advice Service.

- When a customer is in arrears on their mortgage, the lender is required to send them a Money Advice Service leaflet 'Problems Paying your Mortgage' that again contains useful information as well as contact details for advice providers Free printed guides - Money Advice Service

Community Groups – Various individual members of Growing Together

- The Emmanuel Church Food Bank confirms that it has a rising number of clients using the service. 30, mainly families, on 22 December 2014.
- There is significant anecdotal evidence about the hardship that the “bedroom tax” is causing in an area where smaller housing units are in short supply.
- Child care costs prevent a lot of parents from getting a job and the availability of free child play groups has diminished.
- Reduce benefit processing delays when there is a change in circumstance. Get rid of sanction system and bedroom tax. Also relief from paying national insurance for those earning low wages would help a lot more than tax relief.
- Local Councils could help low paid workers by encouraging running buses earlier and providing free car parking especially on Victoria Street. Workers get picked up here by employers' coaches but it costs £7 a day to park there.
- Many churches and church led charities, such as Food Banks, are helping those who are desperate and signposting them to other agencies. CAP (Christians Against Poverty) are running money courses to help people budget. Credit Unions are helping people save a little so they can borrow with low interest to finance large expenditure.
- Supermarkets should be encouraged to find ways to reduce waste, for example by finding socially responsible outlets for surplus/sub-standard food that would otherwise be destroyed.
- Growing Together is principally a funding programme and has supported a number of organisations working with the poorest families in the former Lumbertubs Ward, e.g. Change of Scene and Free 2 Talk youth groups, pre-

schools and schools and Children's Centres and the new Blackthorn Community Nursery.

- Poverty leads to stress and mental health problems. Stress in turn is closely correlated with a number of physical conditions such as eczema, asthma and other upper respiratory tract diseases. Physical health suffers when people cannot afford their prescriptions or to eat healthily. Children who go to school without breakfast are known not to be able to concentrate. Even some breakfast clubs are costing too much for families with several children to afford. Free school dinners help but are not available during the holidays, so food vouchers should be given to these families so they can feed their children properly.
- A lead needs to be taken on identifying the local issues that can be addressed better through partnership working and then bringing together the people and organisations who can build something more effective than the sum of the parts by working together and supporting them in doing so.
- Many people are unaware of what is available as a lot of information is online and not everyone has access at home, or is computer literate. The "digital divide" has created significant information poverty. There are fewer noticeboards where info can be displayed for free - even libraries keep most posters in a folder.
- Not all households in poverty are not being reached. Significant numbers of "households" are living in sub-tenancies in some parts of town and others are dropping out of reach due to funding restrictions and the targeting of resources in the name of austerity.
- A variety of organisations provide information, advice, money advice/debt counselling and financial literacy support. It is of some concern that the Borough Council is now embarking upon a review of the funding of these information and advice services. The evidence of such services will almost certainly suggest that they are stretched increasingly tightly in current circumstances. It is therefore essential that this review, at the very least, does not add to the front-line strain and, if the concern for tackling poverty suggested by this Scrutiny Review is to be taken seriously, that it improves the quality and availability of such services. Outreach to further out parts of town (like the NN3 estates) is a real need. Partnerships with GP surgeries food banks, libraries, Children's Centres etc. should be considered a priority.

4 Desktop Research

- 4.1 Desktop research was undertaken regarding best practice and successful initiatives in identifying and delivering solutions to alleviate poverty.
- 4.2 Hartlepool School Uniform Recycling Scheme supports parents and carers of school age children to access good quality second hand school uniform free of charge. On average, around six families a week are assisted with new and recycled clothes.
- 4.3 The Greater Manchester Poverty Commission (GMPC), in undertaking its review, found that those living in poverty face hunger, isolation, fear and frustration. The largest group, living on the lowest incomes, are reported to be families with children and home owners. Many of those living in poverty are in part-time work, low waged and suffer from fuel poverty, food poverty and have reduced access to basic services such as transport and technology. The key recommendations from the report of the GMPC are around the themes:
- Food, fuel and finance
 - Access to key services
 - Jobs and growth
 - Monitoring and moving forward
- 4.4 Greater Manchester housing providers produce a series of newsletters entitled “Poverty Issue” that shares ideas, expertise and good practice. From sharing ideas, awareness has been raised outside the housing sector and is bringing about new collaborations.
- 4.5 Yorkshire Coast Homes produced its Anti-Poverty Strategy that comprises four key objectives:
- To maximise the income of their tenants and, where possible, the wider community
 - To reduce the cost of living across their communities
 - To improve the employment prospects and opportunities for their communities
 - To empower their communities to help themselves and become more sustainable
- 4.6 A significant budget of £100,000 was allocated to introduce anti-poverty measures. Yorkshire Coast Homes has delivered a variety of projects including working with other Agencies regarding the availability and provision

of food parcels, introduction of a weekly lunch club, a recipe book that details healthy eating on a budget, distribution of over one hundred winter warm packs and partnership working with local schools to help support poverty initiatives.

4.7 The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) published a document “Fuel Poverty Policies and Progress – A guidance note for Overview and Scrutiny Committees” in 2011. This publication by National Energy Action, sponsored by the Department for Energy and Climate Change, explains fuel poverty, and how tackling fuel poverty can reduce health inequalities. It is a comprehensive guide to the whole issue of fuel poverty. The CfPS comments that there are a number of tools available to inform Scrutiny review benchmarking exercise that identifies the current situation and how this relates to best practice. There is also further assistance for Local Authorities and their partners from:

- National Energy Action (NEA)
- Warm Zones cic
- The Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP)
- Decent Homes Programme
- Winter Fuel Payments
- Cold Weather Payments

4.8 The City of Lincoln Council’s Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee was shortlisted for a Centre for Scrutiny (CfPS) good scrutiny award in 2014 for its scrutiny review – Poverty in Lincoln. The impact of the Scrutiny review included:

- the Lincoln Poverty Conference brought together 110 partners from more than 50 organisations;
- led to the creation of Lincoln Anti-Poverty Strategy;
- issues of poverty gained significant media exposure and its profile has been raised locally and within the council;
- a number of specific initiatives aimed at relieving poverty: full council tax discounts retained; bulk energy purchase scheme launched; Credit Union account for council tenants and year 7 students with a £10 deposit from Council; new furniture recycling scheme with voluntary sector partner.

The Scrutiny review ended in the production of the Lincoln Anti-Poverty Strategy 2014-2016, and the Lincoln Anti-Poverty Action Plan 2014/2015.

4.9 The Heat is on Project provided support to Scrutiny Committees and Officers in two Local Authorities – Carmarthenshire County Council and Newport City Council to raise the profile of fuel poverty, to help prioritise action on achieving affordable warmth and to develop Councillors’ roles in this area. The Project was funded by SWALEC and supported by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). The Project highlighted that fuel poverty affects all sectors of society across all age groups. The Scrutiny review that Carmarthenshire County Council undertook looked at identifying areas of poverty requiring further development in relation to initiatives to tackle poverty. The review undertaken by Newport City Council identified those who the Committee felt were most likely to be at risk and engaged them in the Scrutiny review.

The results of the Project included:

- The development of an Affordable Warmth Action Plan
- Development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Improved understanding among Councillors of how they can help their constituents with their fuel bills, access to debt and benefit advice and opportunities to improve the energy efficiency of homes in their area
- Launch of a multi-Agency advice service

4.10 Joseph Rowntree Trust (JRT) published its paper [“Reducing Poverty in the UK: A collection of evidence reviews”](#) in August 2014. The paper details how poverty in the UK compares with other countries, in Europe and elsewhere. It also compares approaches to reducing poverty across these countries, looking for evidence of strategies that work. This paper will help JRT build the evidence base for a strategy to reduce poverty of all age groups and each UK nation that JRT aims to publish by the end of 2015.

4.11 Results of the desktop research exercise are detailed at Appendix C.

5 Community Impact Assessment

5.1 Overview and Scrutiny ensures that it adheres to the Council’s statutory duty to provide the public with access to Scrutiny reports, briefing notes, agendas, minutes and other such documentation. Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Scrutiny Panels are widely publicised, i.e. on the Council’s website, copies issued to the local media and paper copies are made available in the Council’s One Stop Shop and local libraries.

5.2 The Scrutiny Panel was mindful of the eight protected characteristics when undertaking this scrutiny activity so that any recommendations that it made

could identify potential positive and negative impacts on any particular sector of the community. This was borne in mind as the Scrutiny Panel progressed with the review and evidence gathered.

5.3 In order that the Scrutiny Panel obtained a wide range of views, a number of key witnesses provided evidence as detailed in section 3 of this report.

5.4 Details of the Community Impact Assessment undertaken can be located on the Overview and Scrutiny [webpage](#).

6 **Conclusions and Key Findings**

6.1 After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn:

Definition of Poverty

6.1.1 The Scrutiny Panel noted that there is no one definition of poverty used in the UK and therefore felt it was important for its own definition of poverty to be agreed and used throughout this review:

- Have nothing set aside for emergencies
- Cannot replace broken goods or furniture
- Can't afford their children's school uniforms, or the cost of school trips
- Have no spare money for holidays, hobbies or leisure activities
- Can't afford to keep their homes warm
- Can't afford to participate in social activities and customs of their community

Statistical data and general trends

6.1.2 Evidence gathered highlighted that Northampton is no different to many large towns in the country, in that deprivation is present in a number of areas. As detailed in section 3.2.1 of this report, seven out of the 129 local "super output areas" in Northampton are in the top 10% most deprived, 27 in top 20%. These are in wards such as Castle, Spencer, Lumbertubs, Thorplands, St Davids, Delapre. These statistics are in relation to the old Borough wards. 66% of Northampton Borough Council (NBC) tenants are in receipt of full or partial housing benefit.

6.1.3 The Scrutiny Panel noted that there are 3.5 million children living in poverty in the UK (27 per cent of children). As at May 2013 there were

8,360 children (18.7%) in Northampton living in families in receipt of out of work benefits. As at 31 March 2013, long-term unemployed figures indicate that in Northampton 3,970 Job Seekers Allowance /Income Support claimants have been claiming benefits for at least three out of the preceding four years. In 2012, the number of households in fuel poverty in England was estimated at around 2.28 million, representing approximately 10.4 per cent of all English households. The East Midlands had the second highest rate of fuel poverty (with a fuel poverty rate of 13%).

- 6.1.4 Evidence received detailed that Welfare Reform changes have greatly increased the number of customers who face a reduction of Housing Benefit and there has been a corresponding increase in Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) applications. The Scrutiny Panel realised that awards of DHP can be the difference between a tenant affording to pay their rent and thereby avoiding falling into arrears.
- 6.1.5 Evidence received demonstrated that some individuals and families on low incomes and/or in receipt of state benefits (working age) are struggling financially and in some cases this is leading to the accrual of debt. Reported factors being the impact of a series of Welfare Reforms, wage restrictions and the cost of living increase.
- 6.1.6 The overall Council Tax collection rate fell by 0.4 percentage points, only its second fall since its inception in 1991. Collection rates fell in 15% of Councils that introduced low minimum payments and in 63% of those with high minimum payments.
- 6.1.7 Statistics showed that employed claimants make up around 21% of housing benefit claimants compared to 11% five years ago. The number of Northampton households capped (total number of benefit) from 15 April 2013 to May 2014 was 135. 1,068 Northampton Social Rented Sector tenants are currently subject to a weekly reduction in their housing benefit. The average reduction equates to £16.10. In 2011/12 NBC made 333 Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) awards to 69 individual DHP applicants. In 2012/13 the number of DHP awards increased by 81% and in 2013/14 the increase [over 11/12] was 310%.

Initiatives in identifying and delivering solutions to tackle poverty in Northampton

- 6.1.8 Local Authorities, and other key Agencies, have a number of processes in place to assist people in poverty, such as advice and support, aimed at preventing debt as well as that designed to assist tenants who are already in arrears offered is by Housing Services, Northampton Borough Council.

The advice and support is aimed at preventing debt as well as that designed to assist tenants who are already in arrears.

- 6.1.9 The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the fact that the Tenancy sign up process has recently been amended and is now undertaken within the one stop shop at the Guildhall.
- 6.1.10 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that work is complete on improving the energy efficiency of Council dwellings in St James and Semilong. Similar energy efficiency improvements are planned and costed in the Asset Management Strategy that Northampton Partnership Homes will be adopting.
- 6.1.11 The Scrutiny Panel felt that promoting the services of the Credit Union could help to prevent individuals obtaining loans with huge interest rates.
- 6.1.12 The Scrutiny Panel emphasised the need for people to be aware of the services and assistance available by service providers, Agencies and Charities.
- 6.1.13 During the review, the Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that Northampton Borough Council confirmed that it would ensure that all of its employees are paid at least the living wage. However, evidence detailed that an estimated 5.24 million people are being paid less than the living wage, up 400,000 in the past year (based on analysis by accountancy firm KPMG).

Economy, crime, health and education

- 6.1.14 The Scrutiny Panel concluded that it is difficult to establish if poverty is actually a main causal factor of crime within these areas without undertaking detailed analysis, utilising a wide range of data and demographic information. To date no specific analysis looking specifically at poverty and crime has been undertaken for Northampton.
- 6.1.15 The Scrutiny Panel realised that if people do not have the basic resources in life such as keeping warm, nutrition, access to physical activity, there is potential for social isolation. Poverty is a big agenda and there is a need to focus on the areas that make a difference to health and wellbeing.
- 6.1.16 People have lifestyle choices but choices are often limited when living in poverty; such as what to eat, keep warm and leisure activities; there is a need to look at where the Local Authority can intervene.

- 6.1.17 Living conditions, such as damp, can be a key concern; this is most important for the frail, elderly and young children.
- 6.1.18 Regarding the gap in life expectancy between the most affluent and those living in poverty, the Scrutiny Panel felt that education is key. For example encouraging people, in particular men, to visit their GP to have regular health checks and stop smoking.
- 6.1.19 The evidence received highlighted that University education helps to raise the aspirations of the local economy; by having better school education outcomes and more University educated people in Northampton more high quality and high paying employers will be attracted to the town. The University of Northampton offers a number of vocational courses such as lift technology, computer gaming technology and waste management.
- 6.1.20 There is often a link between mental health issues and the ability to cope. For example, individuals who lack the ability to prioritise, organise and manage.
- 6.1.21 The number of young people not in education, training or work has decreased by 25% over the past three years.

Other Groups and Agencies

- 6.1.22 The majority of key Agencies know about each other's services and are able to make effective referrals. The Scrutiny Panel felt that this could be improved by an information hub being developed, virtual and physical, which could have a database of literature/information on relevant Agencies/services. The Scrutiny Panel considered that this could be very helpful for, not only Agencies wishing to make referrals, but could also be accessible for the public to find services they need.
- 6.1.23 The Scrutiny Panel highlighted the need for a strong referral network amongst local Agencies (statutory and voluntary). Signposting is often not always effective for people as they have too many places to visit and relay their situation to. An effective referral network allows full and specific referrals to be made and is less likely to result in the individual not accessing the services they need. Networking events and a robust framework for all Agencies to be clear about their services and access would be a useful tool.

- 6.1.24 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged the good work of Restore Northampton recognising the need to see where the Council could add value to the process. For example, how the Council could work together to inform people of the smaller charities in existence; in addition to the high profile ones; how they could donate and how information about the smaller charities could be disseminated; such as promoting the work of smaller scale charities in the Council's One Stop Shop and linking businesses with smaller charities. The Scrutiny Panel further felt that it would be useful to make allotment holders aware of the Project and ask whether they could provide some support to the Restore Northampton project.
- 6.1.25 The Scrutiny Panel welcomed work that is currently being undertaken with Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) regarding a national awareness programme about cancers.
- 6.1.26 The Scrutiny Panel reiterated the three recommendations of the Scrutiny Review – Impact of the Welfare Reform Act, noting the link between these and mitigating the impact of poverty:
- Close links into and between the Voluntary Sector and Northampton Borough Council are promoted.
 - Active promotion of the work of Voluntary Sector organisations, such as (Charity Link, Citizens Advice Bureau and Community Law) takes place on the Council's website, within the One Stop Shop and as part of outreach activities such as tenants' conferences.
 - Service Level Agreements with Voluntary Sector organisations are explicit in relation to the necessity to provide support and advice to customers facing sanction.

Other Public Services

- 6.1.27 The Scrutiny Panel conveyed concerns regarding Universal Credit and the fact that the claimant would receive all of their benefits and be expected to budget. It highlighted the need for training on budget management.
- 6.1.28 It was felt that sanctions are a key issue to benefit claimants and there is a need for more awareness raising regarding sanctions.

7

Recommendations

7.1 The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel was to review poverty in the town to ascertain whether it is a serious issue:

- Whether it growing and more generally what are the trends (including migration)
- What are the causes of poverty locally?
- What can public services do in this time of austerity?
- What can other groups/individuals do to help?
- What the impact is, if any, is there on the economy, crime, health and education

Scrutiny Panel 2 recommends to Cabinet that:

7.1.1 The definition of poverty, as devised by the Scrutiny Panel (Poverty in the Town), is used by Northampton Borough Council:

- Have nothing set aside for emergencies
- Cannot replace broken goods or furniture
- Can't afford their children's school uniforms, or the cost of school trips
- Have no spare money for holidays, hobbies or leisure activities
- Can't afford to keep their homes warm
- Can't afford to participate in social activities and customs of their community

7.1.2 Northampton Borough Council actively promotes of the work of Voluntary Sector organisations, such as Charity Link, Citizens Advice Bureau and Community Law via the Council's website, within the One Stop Shop, as part of outreach activities, such as tenants' conferences, and by having a regular information stand on the town's market.

7.1.3 Northampton Borough Council works with the Director of Health, Northamptonshire County Council, in the promotion of national health and wellbeing awareness campaigns in Council facilities such as the One Stop Shop and through links available on the Council's website.

7.1.4 Northampton Borough Council works with the Voluntary and Community Sector regarding the introduction of a strong referral network amongst Agencies.

- 7.1.5 Northampton Borough Council allotment holders are informed of the Restore Northampton Project and provided with details of how they can provide assistance to the Project.
- 7.1.6 Northampton Borough Council and Voluntary Impact Northampton work together to inform people of, and promote both the smaller charities and the high profile charities.
- 7.1.7 Northampton Borough Council promotes the work of smaller scale charities in the Council's One Stop Shop, through links on the Council's website and considers how it can link businesses with smaller charities.
- 7.1.8 Northampton Borough Council promotes the work of Northamptonshire Credit Union to encourage people to use it as an alternative to payday loans.
- 7.1.9 Northampton Partnership Homes is asked to provide budget management training and money advice (including information about avoiding and mitigating sanctions) for its tenants; ahead of the introduction of Universal Credit.
- 7.1.10 Northamptonshire Partnership Homes is asked to promote the work of Northamptonshire Credit Union to its tenants.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 7.1.11 A copy of the final report is sent to the Environment, Development and Transport Scrutiny Committee, Northamptonshire County Council.
- 7.1.12 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers commissioning a Scrutiny review on inequalities between estates and wards within the borough of Northampton.
- 7.1.13 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report in six months' time.

Appendices



Appendix A

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

SCRUTINY PANEL 2 - POVERTY IN THE TOWN

1. Purpose/Objectives of the Review

- To review poverty in the town to ascertain whether it is a serious issue:
 - Whether it growing and more generally what are the trends (including migration)
 - What are the causes of poverty locally?
 - What can public services do in this time of austerity?
 - What can other groups/individuals do to help?
 - What the impact is, if any, is there on the economy, crime, health and education

2. Outcomes Required

- To make informed recommendations to all relevant parties on the most appropriate approaches to take to address the causes and mitigate the impact of poverty in Northampton

3. Information Required

- Background data
- Background reports
- Best practice data
- Desktop research
- Evidence from expert internal witnesses
- Evidence from expert external witnesses
- Site visits (if applicable)

4. Format of Information

- Background data, including:
 - Presentation to set the scene: To identify the prevalence of the problem locally
 - Relevant national background research papers, such as poverty and welfare strategies
 - Relevant findings from the Scrutiny Review: Impact of the Welfare Reform Act
 - Relevant Legislation
 - Relevant data, including relevant data such as payroll information, poverty indicators, activity costs, employment trends, demographics (national and local)
- Best practice and successful initiatives in Northampton and comparable Local Authorities
- Witness Evidence:
 - Internal**
 - Cabinet Member for Housing, Northampton Borough Council (NBC)
 - Cabinet Member for Finance, NBC
 - Head of Revenues and Benefits, LGSS
 - Chair, Community Safety Partnership (CSP)
 - Director of Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning, NBC
 - External**
 - Community Law
 - Northampton and District Citizens Advice Bureau
 - Living Wage Foundation
 - Joseph Rowntree Foundation
 - Community and Voluntary Sector
 - Northampton Chamber of Commerce
 - Public Health
 - Education Services, Northamptonshire County Council (NCC)
 - Children's Services, NCC
 - Child Poverty Action Group
 - Church Action on Poverty
 - Inter Faith Forum
 - Community Groups such as Blackthorn Good Neighbours
 - An academic who has undertaken research into poverty locally

5. Methods Used to Gather Information

- Minutes of meetings
- Desktop research
- Site visits
- Officer reports
- Presentations
- Examples of best practice
- Witness Evidence:-
 - Key witnesses as detailed in section 4 of this scope

6. Co-Options to the Review

A local academic and the Chair of the relevant Scrutiny Committee, Northamptonshire County Council, to be approached to be co-opted to this review

7 Community Impact Screening Assessment

- A Community Impact Screening Assessment to be undertaken on the scope of the review

8 Evidence gathering Timetable

May 2014 – March 2015

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| • 12 May 2014 | - Scoping meeting |
| • 23 July | - Evidence gathering |
| • 11 September | - Evidence gathering |
| • 19 November | - Evidence gathering |
| • 8 January 2015 | - Evidence gathering |
| • 12 February | - Evidence gathering |
| • 11 March | - Approval final report |

Various site visits will be programmed during this period, if required.

Meetings to commence at 6.00 pm

9. Responsible Officers

Lead Officer David Kennedy, Chief Executive

Co-ordinator Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

10. Resources and Budgets

David Kennedy, Chief Executive, to provide internal advice.

11. Final report presented by:

Completed by March 2015. Presented by the Chair of the Panel to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then to Cabinet.

12. Monitoring procedure:

Review the impact of the report after six months (December 2015/January 2016)



Appendix B

SCRUTINY PANEL 2 – POVERTY IN THE TOWN

CORE QUESTIONS – EXPERT ADVISORS

The Scrutiny Panel is currently undertaking a review to review poverty in the town to ascertain whether it is a serious issue:

- Whether it is growing and more generally what are the trends (including migration)
- What are the causes of poverty locally?
- What can public services do in this time of austerity?
- What can other groups/individuals do to help?
- What the impact is, if any, on the economy, crime, health and education

The expected outcome of the review is to make informed recommendations to all relevant parties on the most appropriate approaches to take to address the causes and mitigate the impact of poverty in Northampton

CORE QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel that poverty is growing within the town? Please can you supply some trend data in support of your response, such as who are the most affected, where it is concentrated and the main causes of poverty.
2. What do you feel are the causes of poverty locally?
3. What can public services do in this time of austerity?
4. What can other groups/individuals do to help?
5. What is being done by your organisation to identify and mitigate household poverty?
6. Are you aware of an impact that poverty has had on the economy, crime, health and education? Please supply further details, together with any supporting statistics.
7. How can partnership working be maximised?
8. What has already been done to tackle poverty and what assistance is currently available?

9. What awareness exists of the different types of assistance that is available and how can this awareness be improved?
10. Are all households in poverty being reached?
11. What support and advice is available to individuals who find themselves in arrears, for example, arrears on mortgage payments?
12. Do you have further information regarding poverty issues which you would like to inform the Scrutiny Panel?



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PANEL 2 POVERTY IN THE TOWN

Appendix C

BRIEFING NOTE: BEST PRACTICE AND SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES IN IDENTIFYING AND DELIVERING SOLUTIONS TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its inaugural scoping meeting, Scrutiny Panel 2 (Poverty in the Town) agreed that it would receive details of best practice and successful initiatives in identifying and delivering solutions to alleviate poverty.

2 Hartlepool School Uniform Recycling Scheme

- 2.1 The School Uniform Recycling Scheme was initially set up by the First Contact and Support Hub in September 2012. This was in response to regular enquiries from parents for help with the cost of school uniform. The aim of the scheme is:

- To support parents/carers of Hartlepool school age children to access good quality second hand school uniform
- To ensure that parents that access the recycling scheme are made aware of other services available through the First Contact and Support Hub including benefit checking and income maximisation
- To encourage the recycling of school uniform

- 2.2 The scheme is based on donations from families. Donations are taken in and offered free of charge to parents who cannot afford uniform for their children. It is a non-means tested service. In addition, the school uniform service has been promoted with all family that have presented with financial/debt management problems.

- 2.3 On average around six families a week are assisted with new and recycled clothes.

3 Greater Manchester Poverty Commission

3.1 The Greater Manchester Poverty Commission (GMPC) was initiated by some Greater Manchester MPs. GMPC included representatives from community and faith organisations; advice and welfare; Trade Unions; social housing; business; members of the public and the media. The Bishop of Manchester chaired of the Commission. The Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO) is part of the secretariat that supported the Commission.

3.2 The GMPC undertook a review using evidence provided by individuals and organisations, and identified the key components of poverty within the Greater Manchester city. It suggests solutions that GMPC feels will improve the lives of people who live in poverty. GMPC reports that it will also challenge those who can make a difference to respond

3.3 The GMPC sought evidence from a wide variety of witnesses. The following questions were asked:

- What does poverty mean to you?
- What, if anything, has changed for you to be in your current situation?
- What do you think it would be like not to be in poverty?
- What would you say are the barriers or obstacles that keep you in poverty?
- What would need to change for you to get out of poverty?

3.4 A number of events were held across Greater Manchester, from May 2012 until 31 October 2012, focussing on the above questions.

3.5 The Greater Manchester Poverty Commission [published](#) its findings on 15 January 2013.

3.6 The Commission found that those living in poverty face hunger, isolation, fear and frustration. The largest group, living on the lowest incomes, are reported to be families with children and home owners. Many of those living in poverty are in part-time work, low waged and suffer from fuel poverty, food poverty and have reduced access to basic services such as transport and technology.

3.7 The reported key recommendations:

“1. Food, fuel and finance

The Commissioners call for the introduction and development of social enterprises in the banking, food and energy sectors.

Local authorities and others are encouraged to set up their own energy provider companies, credit unions and bulk food purchase

'supermarkets/food banks'. This would see shareholder profit replaced with reduced prices, social responsibility and greater benefit to the local community.

To improve the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables, it is recommended that food be grown and shared in communities – reducing waste and ensuring it gets to those in need.

2. Access to key services

The Commissioners call for steps to be taken to improve access to key services for those living in poverty. This includes the expansion of free transport and the provision, by social enterprises and local authorities, of affordable broadband and IT equipment.

There is also a request for free legal advice to be reviewed, optimised and developed; and for an increase in the availability and provision of quality childcare. Access to services should be tested to ensure that those experiencing poverty can access them.

3. Jobs and growth

The Commissioners ask that the current economic growth agenda should have realistic plans to address poverty and call on the private and statutory sectors to promote the adoption of a Living Wage, as opposed to a minimum wage, to raise standards of living. At the time of the publication of the report, the Living Wage was about £7.45 per hour

The Government's City Deal development program should be enhanced by a Social City Deal which would give more control to local authorities over a local welfare agenda and reduce the risk of any top-down approach to growth failing to focus or alleviate poverty.

4. Monitoring-moving forward

It is reported that the Commissioners wish to see further work being done to create a voice for all Greater Manchester, establishing an on-going poverty working group and the development of a Greater Manchester Index, so that the extent of poverty across Great Manchester can be known and understood.

It comments that there is a need to join forces with Fairness Commissions in Liverpool, York, Newcastle and London to campaign and lobby on common issues."

4 Sharing Ideas

- 4.1 Greater Manchester housing providers undertook a scoping exercise that evidenced how far reaching its poverty work is and how different providers are more advanced than others. To raise awareness of the

recommendations made by the Greater Manchester Poverty Commission and the linkages to work being done, and to give staff the opportunity to share their projects and for others to pick up ideas for potential projects, a series of four newsletters were produced entitled “The Poverty Issue”:

[Newsletter 1 – The Poverty Issue](#)

[Newsletter 2 – Focus on Fuel Poverty](#)

[Newsletter 3 – Focus on Food Poverty](#)

[Newsletter 4 – Focus on Debt and Financial Inclusion](#)

- 4.2 The reported benefits of sharing ideas are that they have prompted the setting up of additional projects aimed at alleviating poverty and have facilitated the sharing of expertise and good practice. They have also raised awareness outside of the housing sector of how far beyond the traditional landlord role they are working and how this is bringing about new collaborations.

5 Yorkshire Coast Homes Approach to tackling Anti-Poverty

- 5.1 Yorkshire Coast Homes is a charitable organisation that owns and manages approximately 4,300 properties in the borough of Scarborough, which includes the three principal towns of Scarborough, Whitby and Filey.

- 5.2 Towards the end of 2012 Yorkshire Coast Homes carried out the customer satisfaction survey Star. Analysis of the results revealed that over 80% of respondents were living on incomes of less than 60% of the 2011 UK median figure of £24,216, and therefore could fall into the definition of poverty.

- 5.3 The draft new Anti-Poverty Strategy was produced. The organisation` reports that whilst its core services have always had a strong emphasis on alleviating poverty and on providing support and assistance for people to improve their personal circumstances, the organisation wanted to do more. The reported aim of the strategy is to relieve poverty amongst the residents, which, as a charitable organisation, is also one of their principal objectives.

- 5.4 Yorkshire Coast Homes consulted tenants, staff and partners to inform on the approach that had been adopted, and further developed the following key objectives that drive their strategy:

- To maximise the income of their tenants and, where possible, the wider community
- To reduce the cost of living across their communities
- To improve the employment prospects and opportunities for their communities

- To empower their communities to help themselves and become more sustainable
- 5.5 In order to support the delivery of these objectives a significant budget of £100,000 was allocated to introduce anti-poverty measures. This was made possible due to efficiency savings.
- 5.6 Over the past 12 months, the organisation has delivered a variety of projects to alleviate poverty under the themes of Financial Inclusion, Food Poverty, Fuel Poverty, Child Poverty and Worklessness.
- 5.7 Examples of some of the specific projects have included:
- Work in conjunction with the Rainbow Centre and the Whitby food bank to develop the availability and provision of food parcels to those in need by:
 - Donating food items
 - Distributing food parcels
 - Helping with storage
 - Providing training to volunteers
 - Introduction of a weekly lunch club, in partnership with Sainsbury's, McCain Foods and the local church, to help in tackling food poverty on their largest estate, Eastfield
 - Production of a recipe book to raise awareness of food poverty issues. The book explains how to eat healthily on a budget and features recipes based on feeding a family of 4 for under £2. The organisation has also produced [Youtube clips](#) with the aim of demonstrating how to make up some of the recipes
 - Distribution of 100+ Winter Warm Packs containing thermal underwear, fleece blankets, hot water bottles, gloves and hats, together with a large number of family and individual festive packs, each containing a variety of seasonal food items
 - Partnership work with local schools to help support poverty initiatives including breakfast clubs, school uniform provision, assistance with school trips, and the alleviation of emergency hardship issues
- 5.8 The organisation has employed an Anti-Poverty Officer through the Government Employees Medical Scheme (GEMS) to coordinate its anti-poverty activity.

6 Fuel Poverty Policies and Progress

- 6.1 The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) published its document ["Fuel Poverty Policies and Progress – A guidance note for Overview and Scrutiny Committees"](#) in 2011. This publication by National Energy Action, sponsored by the Department for Energy and Climate Change, explains fuel poverty, and how tackling fuel poverty can reduce health inequalities. It is a comprehensive guide to the whole issue of fuel poverty.
- 6.2 Government policy has been set out in its UK Fuel Poverty Strategy and, for England, in its Plan for Action. The aim of the Strategy in England is that, by 2016, as far as is reasonably practicable, no person in England should have to live in poverty.
- 6.3 The main elements of the package to deliver the fuel poverty strategy through addressing the energy efficiency of dwellings and increasing households' incomes are:
- Warm Front - Grant scheme that provides a package of heating and insulation measures to eligible low-income private sector households.
 - The Carbon Emissions Reduction Target – An obligation on energy companies to reduce the amount of CO2 emitted by households by promoting the uptake of low carbon energy solutions to household energy consumers. A significant proportion of the funds have to be spent on vulnerable households
 - The Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) – An obligation on energy companies to deliver co-ordinated, area-based energy efficiency programmes, in areas of low income, in partnership with Local Authorities and community organisations
 - Decent Homes Programme – to improve the thermal comfort of social housing
 - Winter Fuel Payments – for those aged 60 or over, paid each winter to offset additional heating costs
 - Cold Weather Payments – to certain benefit claimants to help with exceptional heating costs resulting from spells of very cold weather
- 6.4 Other Government initiatives supplement these programmes, such as advice on energy, efficiency, debt rebates, energy tariffs and payment options.
- 6.5 The CfPS comments that there are a number of tools available to inform Scrutiny review benchmarking exercise that identifies the current situation

and how this relates to best practice. There is also further assistance for Local Authorities and their partners from:

- National Energy Action (NEA) – has produced “Addressing the affordable warmth needs of communities; a toolkit for local action” – its reported purpose is to assist to benchmark current performance, understand fuel poverty in the area, and to develop a vision, targets and tasks to deliver progress towards best practice.
- Warm Zones CIC – a not-for-profit community interest company owned by NEA which works with Local Authorities, energy suppliers and partners to develop area-based affordable warmth schemes
- The Energy Saving Trust – a leading source of independent and impartial advice and guidance; funded by Government and the private sector. It is reported that the Trust helps people save energy and reduce carbon emissions. One of its reported main roles is to help Local Authorities and communities to save energy.
- Carbon Action Network – The Network has the reported aim of supporting Local Government officers with a remit to reduce all aspects of the UK’s domestic-sector carbon footprint and to tackle fuel poverty.
- Centre for Sustainable Energy – A national charity that has the reported aim to tackle the threat of climate change and end cold homes. A range of services are provided for Local Authorities designed to help Councils meet their current targets and commitments more effectively and to develop their role in building a low-carbon, sustainable energy future for their local area. Support provided includes toolkits and support in assessing and benchmarking performance on carbon reduction and tackling fuel poverty, strategy and policy development, technical support, staff training and energy awareness campaigns.

7 Poverty in Lincoln – Scrutiny Review (2013)

7.1 The Scrutiny review, Poverty in Lincoln, completed by the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee, City of Lincoln Council, was shortlisted for a Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Good Scrutiny Award in June 2014.

7.2 It is reported that Lincoln, as a post-industrial city, faces a number of economic challenges: high unemployment, lower than average wages and areas of acute deprivation. The combination of significant changes to benefits and the ongoing recession led the City of Lincoln scrutiny committee to review what the council was doing to tackle poverty.

Evidence was gathered using statistical data, a comprehensive literature review and evidence from experts, voluntary groups and residents.

7.3 The reported key aspirational outcomes of the review were agreed:

- Those residents in most need “see and feel” the outcome of the review
- Raising public awareness of the scale of the problem of poverty in Lincoln
- Identifying the key factors contributing to/causing low income in the city, including low pay, under-employment and the impacts of the Welfare Reform
- Identifying the distribution of poverty in the city, and where the acutest issues are located
- A description of major impacts/effects of low income, with particular regard to educational under-attainment, health outcomes, and access to affordable housing
- Collating information about the work being done by organisations in the city to relieve poverty
- Identifying the gaps in provision and/or areas of duplication of effort
- Providing the Council with a written report, which includes recommendations, based on the evidence gathered, to mitigate the short to medium effects of poverty on residents in the city, through the development of a multi-Agency strategy and action plan
- Opportunity to link into, and inform, the emerging Growth Strategy for the city in terms of tackling the longer term structural issues

7.4 The CfPS highlights the impact of this high profile Scrutiny review:

- the Lincoln Poverty Conference brought together 110 partners from more than 50 organisations;
- led to the creation of Lincoln Anti-Poverty Strategy;
- issues of poverty gained significant media exposure and its profile has been raised locally and within the council;
- a number of specific initiatives aimed at relieving poverty: full council tax discounts retained; bulk energy purchase scheme launched; Credit Union account for council tenants and year 7 students with a £10 deposit from Council; new furniture recycling scheme with voluntary sector partner.

7.5 The Scrutiny review was endorsed by Alex Ray, from Longhurst & Havelok Homes, and Chair of Lincolnshire Credit Union “*The scrutiny process was thorough and the councillors and officers were keen to listen to the views of a range of partners. The conference was a huge success and it has provided a real impetus for organisations to work together to address the causes and consequences of poverty. The council provided a strong lead*”

with senior staff and councillor involvement but there was a real sense of listening, involvement and engagement of the variety of organisations involved.

7.6 The Scrutiny Committee reports that its review culminated in the production of the [Lincoln Anti-Poverty Strategy 2014-2016](#), and the Lincoln Anti-Poverty Action Plan 2014/15. The Strategy consists of series of objectives, each with a range of programmes for further action:

- Helping people maximise their income
- Making the move to work easier
- Helping with the cost of raising a child
- Breaking the link between poor health and poverty
- Making sure older people get the service they need
- Improving the condition of people's homes
- Working in a joined up way

7.7 None of the objectives will be progressed at the same speed or time.

8 The Heat is on Project

8.1 The Welsh Assembly set targets to eradicate fuel poverty in all vulnerable households by 2010, in all social housing by 2012, and in all households by 2018. There is no statutory duty for Local Authorities to address fuel poverty as an issue.

8.2 The Heat is on Project provided support to Scrutiny Committees and Officers in two Local Authorities (Carmarthenshire County Council and Newport City Council) to raise the profile of fuel poverty, to help prioritise action on achieving affordable warmth and to develop Councillors' roles in this area. The Project was funded by SWALEC and supported by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the Welsh Assembly Government.

8.3 The Project highlighted that fuel poverty affects all sectors of society across all age groups. Most vulnerable people, for example, people with poor health, older people and children may be more susceptible to the worst health consequences of living in cold homes. It is further reported that the consequences of fuel poverty are seen in hospitals, GP surgeries, schools, communities and the economy. Tackling fuel poverty can reduce pressure on all these and other services as well as helping to meet Council targets in areas such as climate change and benefit uptake.

8.4 A national Steering Group was established that allowed the sharing of experiences. The two Scrutiny Committees therefore received information from national perspectives and the national organisations could inform their Policy making decisions based on lessons learnt from the Scrutiny reviews.

8.5 The Steering Group included representatives from:

- Scottish and Southern Energy
- Save the Children
- Welsh Local Government Association
- Welsh Assembly Government
- Age Concern
- Help the Aged
- Two Pilot Local Authorities – Carmarthenshire County Council and Newport City Council

Scrutiny Review – Carmarthenshire County Council

8.6 Carmarthenshire County Council looked at a wide range of Council strategies to ensure a thorough review of poverty. This included the Children and Young People's Plan, the Health, Wellbeing and Social Care Strategy, the Affordable Warmth Strategy, the draft Affordable Housing Delivery Plan, the Communities First Plan, the Community Strategy and the Economic Development Strategy 2005-2015. The Scrutiny Committee worked with a range of bodies and Agencies for a multi-Agency approach. The aim was to identify areas of poverty requiring further development in relation to initiatives to tackle poverty.

Scrutiny Review – Newport City Council

8.7 The review undertaken by Newport City Council identified those who the Committee felt were most likely to be at risk and engaged them in the Scrutiny review. Various workshops were held and site visits were undertaken through Care and Repair Newport into the homes of two elderly clients. The site visits highlighted the support that Care and Repair can provide. The Committee also visits examples of good practice in operation such as The Warm Wales Programme in Neath and the Health through Warmth Programme in the Vale of Glamorgan.

8.8 The results of the Heat is on Project included:

- The development of an Affordable Warmth Action Plan
- Development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Improved understanding among Councillors of how they can help their constituents with their fuel bills, access to debt and benefit advice and opportunities to improve the energy efficiency of homes in their area
- Launch of a multi-Agency advice service

- 8.9 At the end of the Project, the Welsh Assembly, SWALEC (gas and electricity supplier throughout Wales) and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) produced a guide – [*The Heat is on – using Local Authority Scrutiny Committees to reduce fuel poverty*](#). The guide is intended for Councillors, Local Authority officers and organisations concerned with fuel poverty.
- 8.10 The Heat is on Project concluded that Scrutiny can be a very effective way of monitoring how affordable warmth plans, where they exist are being put into action. It goes on to say that Scrutiny enables Councillors to recognise the extent of the problem of fuel poverty and to see what responsibilities and opportunities the Local Authority has for addressing it and making links between fuel poverty and other policy areas. The Project influenced Policy and cross-cutting links were made. Cross-working is highlighted to be valuable in within the topic of fuel poverty as it is an issue that affects a number of Agencies and departments.

9 Reducing Poverty in the UK: A Collection of evidence reviews

- 9.1 Joseph Rowntree Trust (JRT) published its paper [“Reducing Poverty in the UK: A collection of evidence reviews”](#) in August 2014. JRT is developing an evidence based strategy to reduce poverty for all age groups and each UK nation. The help build the evidence base for this strategy, JFT commissioned researchers to carry out reviews of existing policy and research on a wide range of social issues that relate to poverty. 33 studies are identified in its paper “Reducing Poverty in the UK: A collection of evidence reviews”. JRT aims to publish its strategy for the UK by the end of 2015.
- 9.2 The paper details how poverty in the UK compares with other countries, in Europe and elsewhere. It also compares approaches to reducing poverty across these countries, looking for evidence of strategies that work.
- 9.3 The paper highlights that strategies are more likely to succeed if they have:
- Political commitment
 - Clear lines of accountability
 - Links to economic policy
 - Systems of governance
 - Co-ordination across government
 - External stakeholder involvement
 - Effective system of monitoring and review
- 9.4 The UK does not have a national strategy. JRT notes that there has been a fall in poverty whereas other countries have seen a rise. JRT reports that this is in part due to the introduction of a range of other anti-poverty policies.

9.5 JRT states that anti-poverty strategies can be an effective way to assign responsibility for poverty reduction, facilitate co-ordination and consensus building and build support for the development of new measures or policies. JRT notes that the timescale associated with anti-poverty strategies mean they need to be embedded in order to survive political change.

9.6 JRT reports that objectives and policies for combating poverty will vary between areas in order to address the differing needs of the communities they serve. For example, mechanisms for encouraging community participation will take different forms but have the same objective. However, drawing upon best practice in local anti-poverty work, the Local Government Management Board's (LGMB) Anti-Poverty Unit has drawn up an 'Anti-Poverty Strategy checklist' of key issues and themes in the development of anti-poverty strategies which serves as an overall framework for the development of individually tailored policies.

9.7 Suggested key themes in the development of anti-poverty strategies:

- Monitoring and evaluation
- Community participation
- Community-based approaches
- Integration into mainstream programmes
- Recognition of limitations
- Role as employers
- Budgets
- The budgetary process
- Partnership working
- Marketing, publicity and feedback

Author: Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor Elizabeth, Chair, Scrutiny Panel 2 – Poverty in the Town

10 October 2014