

Child Poverty in Southend: *Are we doing enough?*



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1. Background

- 1.1 On 13th June 2011, the Council's Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee decided to undertake an in-depth study to examine current policy and strategy, and the contribution that the Council and the activities of partner organisations make in tackling Child Poverty in Southend-on-Sea.
- 1.2 The Committee was assisted in this work by a dedicated project team comprising:
 - Councillors E A Day (Chairman), N J Folkard (Vice-Chairman), T Byford, M T Caunce, J I Courtenay, A J Delaney, I D Gilbert, M R Grimwade, D F Russell. Councillors P W Ashley and B A Godwin also supported the project team.
 - Officer / partner support was provided by Sue Hadley (Head of Specialist Children's Services), Darren McAughtrie (Group Manager, Strategic Commissioning and Early Years), Tom Dowler (Data & Performance Manager Children & Learning) and Tim Row (Principal Committee Officer).
- 1.3 During the course of the study, the Committee considered a request by the Cabinet, in response to a motion referred to it by the Council, that it extend the remit of this work to look at the wider issues of poverty in Southend. Whilst the Committee noted and accepted the merits of this request, it concluded that it would not be possible to achieve any real constructive or purposeful outcomes in the timescale available for the identified project.
- 1.4 As a result of the motion however, the Southend Partnerships Team were, commissioned to undertake a review of the wider issues of poverty and to organise a half-day conference to review the current actions being undertaken by partners to reduce poverty. Accordingly, it was felt that the Committee could collaborate with the Partnerships Team to help co-ordinate its work and help inform their research and recommendations, whilst focussing on Child Poverty.
- 1.5 The aim of the Scrutiny Project was to raise awareness of the impact of poverty on a child's life chances and seek to break the cycle of poverty, share and highlight best practice and to make recommendations to amend, where appropriate, the Children & Young Peoples Plan and the Child Poverty Strategy. The objectives agreed for the study were:
 - To gain an understanding of child poverty levels / statistics in Southend and how the local position compares to the regional and national picture;
 - To consider and compare what other initiatives are in place within other Local Authorities and identify best practice; and

- To consider, assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the activities being undertaken by the Council, and its partners and suggest possible changes / improvements.
- 1.6 The Committee would like to thank all those involved with the scrutiny project and those who took the time to attend meetings, participate in the event and provide information. This input has helped to enrich the findings of the study.

2. Defining Child Poverty

- 2.1 The Scrutiny was surprised to learn that there are a number of definitions used to describe Child Poverty but there was no overarching definition for Child Poverty that is recognised by all partners/agencies. One of the recognised definitions, and the one identified by the Scrutiny Committee for the purposes of this study is that used by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) in their Child Poverty Strategy 2007 which defines it as follows:

“A Child in poverty lives in a family with resources that are far lower than the average, with the result that they don’t fully participate in society.”

- 2.2 The national measure of child poverty is NI 116 and is the combination of:

- The proportion of children (aged 0-15) who live in families where out of work benefits are received
- The proportion of children living in households with income below 60% of contemporary median equivalised household income.

- 2.3 However, this alone does not capture the children living in families where ‘in work’ poverty is the problem. Both in work poverty and poverty among benefit claiming families are important. National research has shown that:

- 68% of children are at risk of poverty if both parents don’t work
- 18% of children are at risk of poverty if one parent works
- 3% of children are at risk of poverty if both parents work

- 2.4 The Child Poverty Act 2010 sets four income-based UK-wide targets to be met by 2020. The targets are based on the proportion of children living in households with:

- relative low income (this measures whether the incomes of the poorest families are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the economy as a whole) – the target is less than 10 per cent;
- combined low income and material deprivation (this is a wider measure of living standards) – the target is less than 5 per cent;

- absolute low income (this measures whether the poorest families are seeing their income rise in real terms) – the target is less than 5 per cent; and
 - persistent poverty (this is defined by the Act as living in relative poverty for at least three of the last four years) – the target is to be set in regulations by 2015.
- 2.5 The Government has recently abolished the National Indicator Set and is in the process of developing a new comprehensive Single Data List. Whilst the local authority still records data under NI116, the Government is proposing a new set of indicators for Child Poverty that encompasses a range of life chances measurements and do not relate to income alone.
- 2.6 Children in poverty is also included as part of the Public Health outcomes framework.

3. What We Did

3.1 The Scrutiny Committee considered a wealth of evidence, including current quantitative data relating to Child Poverty levels in Southend and how it compared to the National Picture and its statistical neighbours. In addition, the Project Team also undertook visits to the view the Sure Start Centre Place Family Centre, where a core range of services are offered covering issues related to pregnancy through to learning new skills that could lead to securing a job, and to the Milton Hall Primary School, a large primary school located in one of the most deprived areas in Southend with over 850 pupils, a high proportion of which are from different ethnic backgrounds.

3.2 The Scrutiny Committee also received presentations from the following people on the dates indicated:

6th February 2012

- Veronica Dewsbury – Council's Benefits Manager
- Alison Nicholls – Council's Group Manager Housing
- Chris Sollis – Community Projects & Volunteer Manager

9th February 2012

- Stephen Lay – Principal, Southend Adult Community College
- Victoria Pallen – Council's East Locality Co-ordinator
- Debbie Priest – Head Teacher, Milton Hall Primary School

3.3 The Scrutiny Committee also took the opportunity to gather current qualitative evidence through the half day poverty conference organised by the Council's Partnerships Team to which key stakeholders were invited. This event took place on 1st March 2012 and brought together over 70 representatives from partner organisations across Southend to map how poverty, in its wider sense, is being addressed by individual organisations, research on the approaches that other local authorities

are taking and examples of innovative initiatives in Southend and other areas.

- 3.4 This event was facilitated by Sherry Fuller, the Council's Strategy & Planning Engagement & Information Officer. A report on the outcome of the review by the Partnerships Team has been prepared and, the research looked at issues of poverty across all ages including children, young adults, working age adults and older people.

4. Findings, Facts and Figures

- The Scrutiny Committee was particularly concerned to note that approximately 23% of children aged 0-15 in Southend lived in poverty¹.
- Child Poverty rates in Southend were slightly higher and increasing at a faster rate than the national average and were significantly higher than the East of England average.
- In the region, only Peterborough and Luton had higher levels of child poverty than Southend as defined by national indicator 116. (A comparison of Child Poverty Levels is attached at [Appendix 1](#)).
- Southend is ranked 94 out 149 local authorities on the Child Well-Being Index (a subset of the Index of Multiple Deprivation) - 1 is good
- 8,505 children living in poverty, approx 4,470 families and around 422 of these have 4 or more children
- 62% were under 11 years of age and 30% were under 5 years of age
- 78% of parents of children living in poverty were on Income Support or Income Based Job Seekers Allowance, with the remaining 22% living in families with an income below 60% claiming the Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit.
- 73% of families in poverty are lone parent families, higher than the national average of 68%
- Lone parents on Income Support/Job Seekers Allowance in Southend is in line with the England average 84%
- 44% of children in poverty in Southend have 2 or more siblings.
- Low-paid jobs do not seem a viable means of removing parents from poverty, even when in receipt of benefits and tax credits leading to in work poverty. Research carried out by Joseph Rowntree Foundation² found that when parents considered entry to paid employment, childcare and other costs were balanced against their wages and other sources of income, meaning overall their income did not necessarily increase.
- Some parents/families may not be claiming benefit, be on low income the level of which is just above then maximum threshold for claiming benefit, be caught in the benefit trap where it is better to

¹ 2006/07 and 2008/9 NI 116 Comparisons

² Ronald McQuaid et al (2010). How can parents escape from recurrent poverty?

remain on benefit than seek employment or be part of the “black economy” where parents get paid cash in hand which is not declared.

- Barriers preventing parents getting paid work such as favourable jobs locally that meet the needs of the family which include suitable working hours, childcare arrangements and the ability to achieve a work-life balance.
- Research undertaken by the DWP showed that disabled adults were twice as likely to be in persistent poverty compared with non-disabled adults. Likewise, the proportion of children in relative poverty is significantly higher in families where at least one member is disabled (29%) than families where no-one is disabled³.
- Amongst Gypsy, Roman and Travellers, employment rates amongst adults and educational attainment amongst children are significantly lower than the national average.
- The cost of childcare particularly for parents on low income is an issue as well as the quality and availability of childcare, particularly for babies. Lack of flexible childcare care is also an issue during weekends, evenings and at short notice. This in turn limits the kind of jobs that parents can get.
- There is no formal way of counting children that are just outside the benefits level.
- The numbers of children claiming free school meals is recorded but the level is clouded due to issues around take up.
- The level of children in poverty was based on data collated up to several years ago. The data showed that the level had not significantly changed since 2006 when the indicator was introduced.

5. What Are We Doing?

5.1 Back in 2009, the Council recognised Child Poverty as a key area of concern. The Southend Children's Partnership, now called the Success for All Children's Group commissioned and produced its first Child Poverty Strategy in October of that year. This strategy identified six key areas for action:

- setting a child poverty 'baseline' and agreeing targets for improvement;
- maximising income in and out of work ;
- removing barriers to work ;
- ensuring the provision of affordable housing;
- mitigating the impact of poverty; and
- breaking the cycle of poverty.

³ Households Below Average Income (2008-09)

- 5.2 The strategy was followed by a comprehensive action plan, to be delivered in 2010/11, which detailed a range of cross partnership activity in addressing the six strategic aims of the strategy. Since 2010, a multi agency Child Poverty Action Group has been established by the Council with colleagues from the NHS, local schools, Job Centre Plus and the local voluntary sector, to drive forward the work.
- 5.3 With the introduction of The Child Poverty Act 2010, a requirement was placed on local authorities to produce a local child poverty needs assessment. The 2011/12 refresh of the Southend Children and Young People's Plan contains a detailed needs assessment and this has helped to update the Child Poverty Strategy. The Child Poverty Action Group have taken into account the needs assessment in its review of the action plan and this has resulted in the Success for All Children's Group identifying in its Children & Young People's Plan 2011-13 lifting children out of poverty as one of its two overarching priorities.
- 5.4 The changing economic climate both nationally and locally, has meant that poverty is becoming a bigger and more relevant issue for a wider number of families. Anecdotal feedback from front line services working with vulnerable families indicates that some of the choices families are making around their finances are having a negative impact on their circumstances, for example, entering into expensive door step loans and retail credit agreements without fully understanding the ongoing costs or implications. As such a new sixth key strategic aim of awareness raising and education has been included to ensure families and professionals are aware of and understand the range of community resources, support services and agencies available to help them make the best choices in managing their finances.
- 5.5 The Council has also used funding it has received in 2010/11 from the Government's Child Poverty Group to commission a pilot project from Family Action. Under this project the Cambridge Road Children's Centre Family Support team worked with health visitors to identify families living in poverty. The team engaged with the families, providing holistic support aimed at maximising their income.
- 5.6 Child poverty funding has also been used to commission a qualified nutritionist to work alongside schools and children's centres.
- 5.7 Additionally, funding has been obtained to subsidise the salaries of 82 apprentices who have been supported by the Council since March through the Apprenticeship Subsidy Scheme. Funding has also been used to support a pre-apprenticeship programme for vulnerable young people including care leavers, those with learning difficulties or disabilities and young offenders. The programme has helped motivate young people previously disengaged with education and training, supporting young people to gain skills and find employment.

5.8 Through the witness sessions and Poverty Conference, the Committee noted several examples of excellent partnership working to tackle the causes of poverty.

(a) Motivate the Estate

The Motivate the Estate initiative is a community transformation programme that brings together professionals, community members and young people in a series of personal development training and coaching sessions, to support and encourage positive change within communities.

Motivate ran a series of personal development trainings over 3 years which included professionals, members of the community and young people the aim being to transform communities in this case the Woodgrange Drive Estate & St Luke's Ward by raising aspirations and challenging the 'nothing ever changes attitude'.

The Coaching for Success programme ran in 4 schools in Southend, during this time 72% of pupils improved their predicted GCSE grades for English, Maths & Science. Negative incidents recorded by the school significantly reduced for the majority of the group (54%) and 59% improved their attendance.

One of most successful programmes was the Coaching for Communities which involved a six day intensive residential for 25 of the hardest to reach young people in Southend. These young people were coached by a volunteer for nine months. At the end of the programme 71% of young people who participated in the Coaching for Communities programme and who were at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) remained in Education.

68% of young people who took part in Coaching for Communities remained partially or fully engaged in the programme for the full nine months.

(b) Milton Hall Primary School

As mentioned in paragraph 3.1, the Milton Hall Primary School is a large primary school located in one of the most deprived areas in Southend with over 850 pupils, a high proportion of which (over 50%) are from different ethnic backgrounds. Around 48% of these pupils have English as an additional language with many coming to school in all year groups with no English at all. Nearly a third of their pupils are from an Eastern European background (with 64 of these coming from a Roma background). Around 47% of pupils currently receive Free School Meals (FSM). The school meal debt is a huge issue for the school (currently £2,325), with those falling just below the threshold for FSM really struggling.

The school has pupils travelling from as far as Southchurch and Shoeburyness but majority come from Milton and Victoria wards. 20% of pupils are known to live in over crowded households and we believe this figure to be higher particularly amongst our Eastern European families. Over 40 languages are spoken, with English, Polish and Bengali being the most popular. A large proportion of pupils have family/learning mentor intervention, approximately half of which have Social care intervention. They currently have several looked after children on roll, some children with Child Protection Plans and a few classified as Children in Need.

Despite these significant challenges, the school is able to identify and remove barriers to learning so that pupils who start at the school at very low levels are able to make great progress. By the end of KS2 FSM pupils make better progress and attain more highly than their non-free school meal pupils, bucking the National Trend. The 2011 SATs tests show:

- 80% of FSM pupils achieving a level 4+ in English compared to the National average of 67%
- 85% FSM achieving level 4+ in Maths compared with a National average of 67%
- 80% achieved a level 4+ in English & maths combined compared with 58% nationally

The school is able build on the pupils' sense of achievement that comes with 'working' to engage with parents and help to change their attitudes to work and learning.

(c) Adult Community College

The Adult Community College offers a wide and diverse range of courses and programmes to help people back to work, to gain better education and learn new life skills. Support is also available for those students who need it. Education and Careers Advisers are on hand to offer impartial information, guidance and advice including:

- The course content
- Its suitability
- The possible progression routes from the course
- The type of support available – both learning and financial

The development of the Community College at Belfairs will enable a greater offer.

(d) Housing

The Council's Housing Service provided assistance to tackle issues of poverty through a variety of initiatives which included:

- Housing Options/ Rent and deposit scheme
- Choice Based lettings

- South Essex Homes Tenancy Sustainment courses
- Private Sector Partnership schemes such as “Hotspot” project and “Warm and Well on Sea” scheme
- Supporting People

(e) Benefits Service

The Council’s Benefits Service, which administers Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Discretionary Housing Payments and the recovery of overpaid Housing Benefit, currently has a target to process all claims within 14 days of receipt and is consistently performing against this target. The service has been transformed to maintain this target and deliver significant savings on the costs of delivery.

A face to face service is offered from both the Civic Offices and 3 Libraries. The library locations were selected based on claimant profile within the Borough and to provide ease of access.

The service has representation on the following groups:

- Child Poverty Action
- Worklessness
- Homelessness Strategy
- Benefit Network

and works with landlords and Housing Options to secure new tenancies and prevent evictions. It liaises closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure residents are receiving the maximum benefits they are entitled to.

It has a proactive Fraud investigation team to prevent and detect fraud and delivers training and briefing sessions to internal and external partners to ensure full understanding of new and existing legislation. Specialist training is provided to staff within the Council’s Children and Learning Department to enable them to support families in times of hardship.

The service makes awards of discretionary housing payments to those suffering short term financial hardship and negotiates affordable repayment schedules for overpaid housing benefit. It also shares information with other Council departments to avoid delays in the awards of other financial assistance.

- 5.11 The Committee noted some case histories about people who had turned their lives around through the support and advice given by the Council and its partners. Some examples are attached at [Appendix 2](#).

6. Are We Doing Enough?

- 6.1 From the outset, the Committee was mindful that there no “quick fix” in eradicating child poverty and that it was not possible for the Council to eradicate the causes of it alone.

- 6.2 The Poverty Conference in March clearly demonstrated that there is a significant amount of work being undertaken already in Southend to tackle and address the issues around Child Poverty. This is borne out through the partnership work of the Child Poverty Action Group and the integrated working, co-location and Common Assessment Framework processes work in identifying and addressing child poverty.
- 6.3 The delegates who attended the conference helped to map the services that were currently provided to assist in setting a baseline and identify any gaps in services or possible duplication.
- 6.4 The research report produced by the Council's Partnerships Team entitled "Addressing All Age Poverty in Southend" includes snapshot of the approaches taken by other local authorities in tackling poverty and Southend's approach in dealing with Child Poverty is consistent with these. The report however, has concluded that Southend has a more acute poverty problem than most other places and our poverty challenge is growing. The service mapping has shown that whilst there is a wide range of agencies tackling poverty, this work could be better focussed or co-ordinated. The report makes a number of recommendations on a broad approach that Southend should take to tackle poverty.
- 6.5 The Council's Child Poverty Strategy and Children and Young People's Action Plan were reviewed in May last year by the Government's regional Child Poverty Adviser. The outcome of her review indicated that Southend was well on track and further ahead than many other areas in the region, with good progress being made in the following areas:
- increasing uptake of free school meals by 1.27% (target was 1%)
 - improving the standard of 137 homes for financially vulnerable householders
 - giving 1,352 families access to loft and cavity wall insulation funding through the Government's Warm Front scheme
 - mapping available volunteering opportunities across Southend
 - brokering 897 volunteering opportunities for young people through the V-Involved initiative (against a target of 600)
 - developing a 'Locality Guidance' toolkit to support integrated working across all services for children
 - enabling 96 vulnerable two-year-olds to benefit from funded child care places (73 allocated) and
 - ensuring a Job Centre Plus presence in Children's Centres and Revenues & Benefits outreach work in libraries and Children's Centres

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 Without a single clear, unilaterally recognised definition for Child Poverty it is difficult to see how the work across all sectors to tackle it can be

measured. The time delay in producing national poverty data also makes it difficult to assess the impact of initiatives.

- 7.2 Poverty is not just about income levels, and focussing on moving people above a theoretical poverty line does not address the deep seated issues that are the main causes and contributing factors. This is reflected in the Government's new approach to deal with Child Poverty.
- 7.3 There is a risk that families where no-one is able to work such as through disability, teenage parents, lone parents etc could remain in poverty for some time. Whilst financial support is available to such families through the benefits system, the levels are on a par with those paid to those who are able to work in the near future. Families with disabled parents, who are looked after by a young carer are particularly vulnerable.
- 7.4 It is therefore essential to tackle the root causes of poverty including worklessness, removing the barriers to work, avoiding debt, strengthening families, improving health and well being and educational attainment to break the inter-generational poverty cycle.
- 7.5 Partnership working in tackling Child Poverty is key, and the good work of the Child Poverty Action Group, the Council and its partners in driving this work forward to date has been documented. The mapping of services undertaken at the Poverty Conference shows that there is a good spread of services tackling the root causes of poverty and many services are currently indirectly tackling the root causes of poverty or elements of it. However, it is clear that further work needs to be done in identifying any gaps in services and how effective the existing services are.
- 7.6 Child Poverty crosses many areas of service delivery and affects different parts of life such as health, education, self-esteem, child care, housing, benefit. Whilst children are born into poverty, it is more than just a child services issue. It would therefore seem logical to broaden the current focus on Child Poverty to a wider approach of Children & Families as a more effective way to break the poverty cycle.
- 7.7 It is also imperative that the work to tackle All Age Poverty remains as one of the core ambitions/priorities of the Council and its partners and is built into our key strategies. The Success for All Children's Group, which was formed from the previous Executive of the Children's Trust Board, is a standing sub group of Southend's Shadow Health & Well Being Board. It is therefore recommended that the Health & Well Being Board takes overall responsibility for the "All Age Poverty" approach, but that the Success for All Children's Group continues to lead on the monitoring and report back to the Health and Well Being Board specifically on the Child Poverty related elements.

Child Poverty Statistics

Local Authorities	2007/08	2008/09	Improved/Declined
SOUTHEND ON SEA	23.0%	23.6%	↓
Sefton	19.9%	20.3%	↓
Telford and Wrekin	24.1%	25.2%	↓
Isle of Wight	20.2%	21.5%	↓
East Sussex	N/A	18.5%	-
Portsmouth	24.0%	25.2%	↓
Kent	N/A	18.0%	-
Medway	20.1%	21.0%	↓
Bournemouth	20.3%	21.1%	↓
Torbay	23.4%	23.7%	↓
Essex	N/A	16.8%	-
Thurrock	19.8%	21.1%	↓
Suffolk	N/A	15.4%	-
Norfolk	N/A	18.3%	-
Cambridgeshire	N/A	13.3%	-
Peterborough	24.00%	24.3%	↓
Luton	28.40%	27.3%	↑
Bedford	N/A	20.0%	-
Central Bedfordshire	N/A	13.1%	-
Hertfordshire	N/A	13.9%	-

Child Poverty Statistics

Surrounding Areas Local Authorities	2007	2008	2007 vs 2008 Direction of Performance	2009	2007 vs 2008 Direction of Performance
Southend-on-Sea	23.1%	23.0%	↓	23.6%	↑
Thurrock	20.4%	19.8%	↓	21.1%	↑
Basildon	22.1%	22.1%	SAME	23.1%	↑
Braintree	13.3%	13.8%	↑	15.4%	↑
Brentwood	10.7%	9.9%	↓	10.7%	↑
Chelmsford	12.3%	11.9%	↓	12.8%	↑
Castle Point	14.3%	15.2%	↑	16.5%	↑
Colchester	16.4%	16.6%	↑	17.2%	↑
Rochford	10.1%	10.2%	↑	11.0%	↑
Maldon	12.5%	12.5%	SAME	13.3%	↑
Tendring	22.9%	23.5%	↑	25.0%	↑

England	21.6%	20.9%	↓	21.3%	↑
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Statistical Neighbours Local Authorities	2007	2008	2007 vs 2008 Direction of Performance	2009	2007 vs 2008 Direction of Performance
Sefton	20.4%	19.9%	↓	20.3%	↑
Telford and Wrekin	24.4%	24.1%	↓	25.2%	↑
Isle of Wight	21.7%	20.2%	↓	21.5%	↑
East Sussex	17.7%	17.7%	SAME	18.5%	↑
Portsmouth	24.9%	24.0%	↓	25.2%	↑
Kent	17.3%	17.0%	↓	18.0%	↑
Medway	20.9%	20.1%	↓	21.0%	↑
Bournemouth	20.8%	20.3%	↓	21.1%	↑
Torbay	23.6%	23.4%	↓	23.7%	↑
Swindon	15.7%	15.9%	↑	17.4%	↑

Appendix 1

Seaside Towns Local Authorities	2007	2008	2007 vs 2008 Direction of Performance	2009	2007 vs 2008 Direction of Performance
Brighton and Hove	22.8%	22.0%	↓	22.0%	SAME
Thanet	26.4%	25.7%	↓	26.7%	↑
Blackpool	29.2%	29.3%	↑	29.5%	↑
Eastbourne	22.4%	21.2%	↓	22.4%	↑
Scarborough	21.1%	20.4%	↓	21.0%	↑
Poole	17.1%	17.0%	↓	17.6%	↑
Hartlepool	29.5%	28.9%	↓	29.2%	↑
Great Yarmouth	24.9%	24.3%	↓	24.7%	↑

East of England Local Authorities	2007	2008	2007 vs 2008 Direction of Performance	2009	2007 vs 2008 Direction of Performance
Essex	15.7%	15.7%	SAME	16.8%	↑
Suffolk	15.0%	14.7%	↓	15.4%	↑
Norfolk	17.6%	17.5%	↓	18.3%	↑
Cambridgeshire	12.6%	12.5%	↓	13.3%	↑
Peterborough	25.3%	24.0%	↓	24.3%	↑
Luton	30.2%	28.4%	↓	27.3%	↓
Bedford	20.4%	19.4%	↓	20.0%	↑
Central Bedfordshire	11.8%	12.1%	↑	13.1%	↑
Hertfordshire	14.5%	13.6%	↓	13.9%	↑



“I have to say I’ve had fantastic support – it’s been brilliant. We now have a great routine and all Ryan’s needs are being met.”

ALISON DAVIS

Proud mum Alison Davis with her son Ryan, left, and Bradley.

Expert support helps mum to meet the challenges of her hyperactive five-year-old son

RYAN Stein is the apple of his mum Alison’s eye even though he is on the go 12 hours a day and his challenging behaviour can leave her exhausted.

The five-year-old has been excessively hyperactive since his brother Bradley was born three years ago and his speech and language is delayed.

But he gets plenty of expert support as Southend-on-Sea Borough Council continues to extend the reach of its multi-disciplinary teams, being set up across the Borough to offer improved services for children, young people and their families.

Mum Alison Davis, aged 37, said: “With Ryan it’s constant, constant hard work. I can understand everything he says but others struggle – so he gets extremely frustrated.”

“He’s quite clumsy and has no concept of danger so when I take him out I have to hold

his hand or use a wrist strap to make sure he doesn’t run off into the road.”

But he’s a lovely, gorgeous boy and I cope well. I love my kids and my life with them. I love the challenge of doing my best for them.”

Strengths and needs

Help was offered when Alison first took Ryan along to the Little Treasures Children’s Centre when he was two. Staff identified his strengths and needs under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), which now forms the basis of a rounded support package.

Council staff supported Alison with benefits applications and moving the family from an unsuitable privately rented flat to a council maisonette with three bedrooms. A son has completed parenting courses and Ryan attended summer play school with special funding.

He has also benefited from speech therapy and undergone tests for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. He is now attending primary school, where his progress is monitored by a special needs co-ordinator.

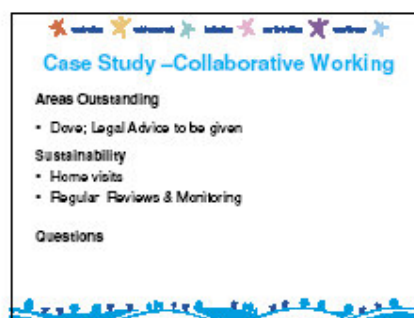
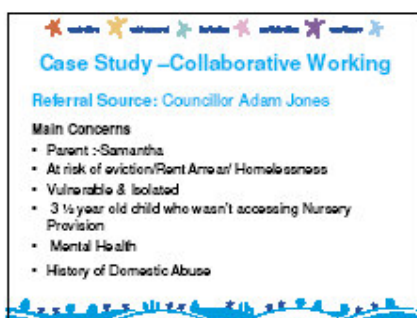
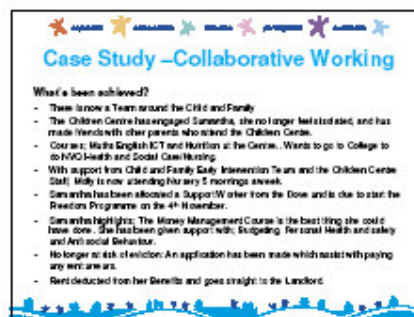
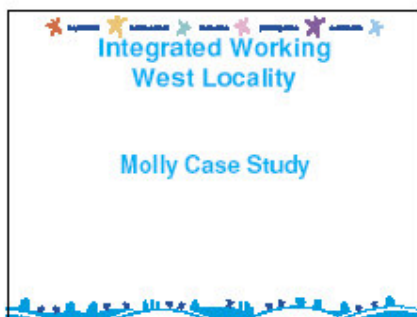
Alison said: “Ryan can’t stay still for five minutes so I’m a bit worried about what will happen when he has to sit at a desk in September.”

“But I have to say I’ve had fantastic support – it’s been brilliant. We now have a great routine and all Ryan’s needs are being met. His speech has improved because he’s at school. He loves toy cars and cuddles and is good at football.”

“But still with Ryan and Bradley’s dad Alan though, we can’t live together. He’s brilliant and sees them all the time. I’d like to think we all have a bright future because both my boys have brains. Ryan will do well in life.”

Pay it – do it online: www.southend.gov.uk

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Background Documents:

- *A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Lives – Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Education – April 2011*
- *Local Authority Progress in Tackling Child Poverty - Local Government Group - May 2011*
- *Southend-on-Sea Children & Young Peoples Plan*
- *Addressing All Ages Poverty in Southend – Southend Borough Council Partnerships Group*