

# Thurrock Council

## Child Poverty Strategy

2011 – 2014

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## 1: Introduction

Children who grow up in poverty are often at risk of social exclusion. There are clear links between poverty and lower educational attainment, poorer health outcomes, poor housing and intergenerational disadvantage. In Thurrock, there is evidence of an attainment gap between children living in areas of the Borough with higher levels of poverty and their peers elsewhere, this gap is evident in children as young as five years old and continues throughout education.

Across most countries of the European Union and the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), child poverty is a major challenge for national states. The previous government pledged to halve poverty by 2010 and set a target of poverty elimination by 2020. An international survey published in 2008 by OECD found that, between 2000 and 2005, poverty and income equality fell faster in the UK than in any other OECD country. However, from 2006, child poverty began to increase again and the gap between the rich and poor remains larger in the UK than in the majority of other OECD member countries.<sup>1</sup>

## 2: Child Poverty Act 2010

The Child Poverty Act 2010 establishes four separate targets to be met nationally by 2020/2021.

These are as follows:

- 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.

Part 2 of the Act introduced new duties on responsible Local Authorities to:

- Cooperate to put in place arrangements to work to reduce, and mitigate the effects of, child poverty in their local area;
- Prepare and publish a local child poverty needs assessment to understand the drivers of child poverty in their local area and the characteristics of those living in poverty; and

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<sup>1</sup> OECD (2008) Growing Unequal?: Income Distribution and Poverty in OECD Countries, Employment 2008, Vol.2008, 10,

- Prepare a joint child poverty strategy setting out measures that the local authority and each named partner propose to take to reduce, and mitigate the effects of, child poverty in their local area.

### 3. Defining and measuring poverty

Child poverty is defined by the national child poverty indicator (NI 116) as the percentage of children who live in families in receipt of out-of-work benefits *or* in working families with income less than 60% of the median national income (taking account of differences in household size and composition).

The threshold is calculated based on taxable incomes plus tax credits and child benefit. In 2008, the poverty threshold (60% below the median national income) was:

£210 a week for a couple with no children

£294 a week for a couple with two children under the age of 14

£225 a week for a lone parent with two children under the age of 14

The number of children living in workless families is calculated by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) on an annual basis using Child Tax Credit (CTC) data as well as data from the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) on families receiving key out-of-work benefits. A family is defined as being workless if no parent in the household works for more than 16 hours per week.

Low income families are defined as working households (where at least one adult works more than 16 hours per week) which are receiving both CTC and Working Tax Credit (WTC). Many of these families will be above the 60% income threshold used and are not counted within child poverty statistics, but the Government considers their income to be low enough to qualify for additional support.

Other material factors contributing to child poverty are local pay levels and the costs of housing and these are included in the assessment of child poverty in Thurrock. In addition and because income poverty is inextricably linked to other forms of deprivation, including poorer health, the risk of debt, poor skills, lack of access to service and resources and social isolation, the assessment includes these as integral to the challenges faced by poorer families in Thurrock.

### 4: Causes and consequences of child poverty

In the UK, as elsewhere, the factors influencing child poverty include family size and structure, the age and educational qualifications of parents, low earnings, ethnicity and lack of employment. Lone parent families are particularly vulnerable to poverty and teenage mothers are three times as likely to suffer poverty compared with older mothers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Katz, I., La Placa, V. & Hunter, S. (2007). Barriers to inclusion and successful engagement of parents in mainstream services: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Disabled adults of working age are twice as likely as non-disabled adults to live in poor households and more than half of families with disabled children live on low incomes. In all parts of the country, people from ethnic minorities are, on average, more likely to live in low income households than white British people.<sup>3</sup>

Poverty results from a complex interplay of influences, involving factors at the level of the family, local neighbourhood, the employment market and wider society. Within this context, factors which appear to be the causes of poverty can also appear as consequences and vice versa. Poor educational attainment is an example of a factor which both drives and is a consequence of the experience of poverty. Poor housing may be the only affordable alternative for poor families, but through its potential effect on health exerts a negative effect on health and achievement, helping to set up a cycle of deprivation.

Poverty is not synonymous with poor parenting but creates additional challenges through the imposition of stress, poorer health and social exclusion. There is considerable evidence of poverty being transmitted from one generation to another, manifesting its effects in the first few years of life. But the home environment is subject to factors which in many cases are beyond the control of families and cannot, therefore, be addressed in isolation.

These features of poverty are in part qualitative and cannot be captured by quantitative measures of income, but are nevertheless relevant to the assessment of child poverty and its effects, within the locality.

National Research conducted by Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) and Barnardo's outlines key factors and the barriers to overcoming child poverty:

- Child poverty is determined by parent/family circumstances.
- Growing up in a workless family is the greatest risk factor for childhood poverty ('out of work' poverty) due to social security benefits not being adequate enough to raise families above the poverty line.
- More than half of poor children live in families where there is an adult in work. Lack of employment in the family is not the only cause of child poverty and to provide work that pays should be considered.
- Risk of child poverty is highest (greater than average risk) among black and ethnic minority groups. Pakistani and Bangladeshi have been identified as being most vulnerable in the group due to low employment rate, employment that is not adequate for social welfare, having on average more children than families overall and lower achievement in education.
- Risk of poverty in lone-parent families is high. In 2007, in lone-parent households, 50% of children were living below the poverty line compared with 23% of children in two parent families.<sup>4</sup> This is primary due to worklessness in lone-parent households.
- Families affected by disability (whether of a parent or child) are at greater than average risk of poverty due to worklessness and extra costs of disability.

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<sup>3</sup> Kenway, P. & Palmer, G. (2007). Poverty among ethnic groups how and why does it differ? New Policy Institute for Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>4</sup> Neera Sharma and Donald Hirsch, *It Doesn't Happen Here: The Reality of Child Poverty in the UK*, Barnardo's, 2007, p. 28.

- Large families (defined by Barnardo's as 3 or more children) are also vulnerable to child poverty due to childcare costs involved if parents enter work (parents of larger families are less likely to work than smaller families) and school uniform and equipment costs.
- Other vulnerable groups to child poverty are:
  - children in asylum seeking families affected by government policy restrictions on working (asylum -seeking families are not allowed to work for the first 12 months of their application and are to rely on state benefits that are only 70% of income support levels) and difficulty for asylum-seeking children to get into school.
  - children living in poor housing are more likely to be ill, run away from home and be excluded from school. There is a shortage of affordable housing, especially due to the sale of council accommodation in the 1980s and reduction of new social housing.

## 5: Needs Assessment

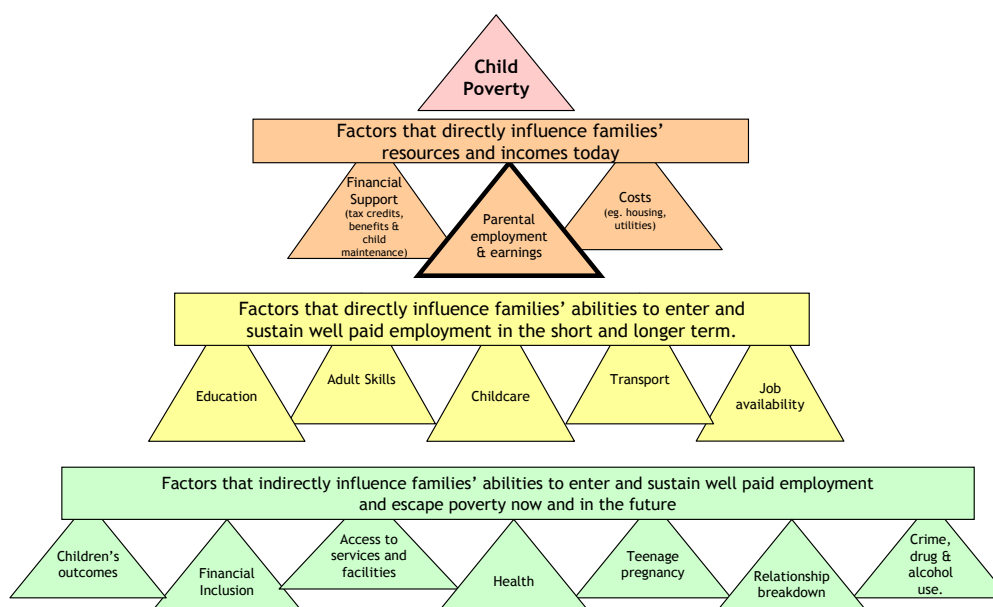
The Child Poverty Act 2010 places a requirement on all Local Authorities to complete a child poverty needs assessment. The needs assessment aims to:

- provide a deeper understanding of the characteristics of children and families living in poverty and the areas within Thurrock in which they live;
- establish the key drivers of child poverty in the area and the links with local service provision;
- assess relevant local service provision across the authority and its partners, its suitability, culture and available resources;
- make clear the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to tackling child poverty in the area; and
- provide a solid foundation for the development of the local child poverty strategy.

### 5.1: Methodology for assessment

The assessment utilises data from a basket of National Indicators (NIs) developed by the Child Poverty Unit which most closely reflect the drivers of child poverty. Much of this data is held on the government websites, the Office of National Statistics; Department of Education; Department for Work and Pensions; Her Majesties Revenue & Customs. Other data has been on regional websites, e.g. the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), in addition to a large number of other sources.

Fig. 1 Child Poverty Pyramid



## 5.2: Summary of Findings

A fifth of Thurrock children are growing up in poverty, according to the official definition of child poverty.<sup>5</sup> The vast majority of the 7,335 children affected are under the age of 11 and more than half are under the age of 5. Overall, child poverty in Thurrock is slightly below the national rate but higher than average for the East of England.

The child poverty measure used by government does not take into consideration families with low incomes that are above the threshold of 60% median income before housing costs, but who may be in poverty after housing costs are taken into account. When these are added to the official child poverty figures the total of children in Thurrock living in poverty may be as high as 8220.<sup>6</sup>

Child poverty exists everywhere in Thurrock but is most concentrated in the deprived parts of the borough. Just 6 of 20 Thurrock wards account for more than half of all children living in poverty.

At Local Super Output Authority level (LSOA), the inequalities between different areas are even more extreme.

In the worst affected neighbourhood - Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock, LSOA 0018D - 55% of children live in poverty, 25 times the proportion in the neighbourhood with the lowest child poverty rate, which is in Corringham & Fobbing.

<sup>5</sup> HMR&C National Indicator 116 (2008)

<sup>6</sup> HMR&C Child Tax Credits. Working tax Credits and Out of Work Families

### 5.2.1: Causes and consequences

Poverty results from a complex interplay of influences, involving factors at the level of the family, local neighbourhood, the employment market and wider society. Within this context, factors which appear to be the causes of poverty can also appear as consequences and vice versa. Poor educational attainment is an example of a factor which both drives and is a consequence of the experience of poverty.

In Thurrock, the areas of the borough which have the highest rates of child poverty in most cases also have the lowest educational attainment; more people in poor health or with disabilities which prevent them from working; higher proportions of workless families; more families who lack bank accounts or home insurance; fewer car owners; and higher proportions of adults who have poor basic skills or who lack qualifications.

### 5.2.2: Risk factors

**Large families:** Almost half of children living in poverty in Thurrock are living in families with three or more children.

**Unemployment:** The vast majority of children living in poverty have parents who are not in work, higher than the East of England average.

**Lone parents:** Nearly three quarters of children in poverty in Thurrock live in lone parent families, a higher proportion than for England as a whole or the East of England. Most of those children are living in families which are also workless.

**In-work poverty:** Among poor children living with two parents, just over a third are in families where at least one parent is in work.

**Children with disabled parents:** Children with disabled parents are more at risk of child poverty, because their parents are less likely to be employed. Data about adult disability in Thurrock is limited, but in the areas with the highest rates of child poverty, the proportion of adults claiming disability benefits is also higher.

**Children with disabilities:** Children with disabilities are more likely to be exposed to child poverty because one or more of their parents are unable to work, or to work full-time. There are more than 800 children with statements of educational need attending Thurrock schools.

**Children in care:** Children and young people who are looked after are among the most disadvantaged groups in England and Wales. The proportion of children in Thurrock who are in care is decreasing, but still above average for the East of England.

**Teenage parents:** Teenage mothers are three times as likely to suffer poverty compared with older mothers. In Thurrock, teenage pregnancy rates were very high, but have fallen since 1998. In 2008, the rate was 41.4, the second lowest rate in the



East of England and below the national average. The highest rates are in Ockendon and Chadwell St Marys.

**Black Minority Ethnic families:** Nationally, BME families are at greater risk of poverty. Limited data is available regarding Thurrock, as HMRC child poverty does not specify ethnicity, but residence data suggest that more ethnic minority families live in the more disadvantaged south of the borough.

### 5.2.3: Trends and drivers

Overall, child poverty rates for Thurrock declined very slightly between 2006 and 2008. However, in some wards there have been small increases.

At LSOA level, the picture is more complex, with positive and negative changes of up to 7%, but nearly half of Thurrock LSOAs experienced an increase in child poverty in the period August 2006-2008. Some of the increase has taken place in more affluent neighbourhoods.

The most recent available HMRC N116 child poverty data is from 2008, which means that any impact on child poverty from the current recession is not yet evident.

The main drivers of child poverty in Thurrock are:

**Worklessness:** Lack of employment is a key factor in creating and perpetuating child poverty. This is particularly the case among families headed by a lone parent.

**Low Pay:** Thurrock has a low wage economy relative to nearby London Boroughs and much of the East of England. In 2009, average weekly earnings in the borough were £470, below the averages both in the East of England (£479) and nationally. Female earnings are 67% of male earnings and between 2009 and 2010, the gap widened further.

**Low skills:** Only 50% of Thurrock's working age population is qualified to at least NVQ Level 2. In 2010, 17,000 people of working age in Thurrock had no qualifications, a rate of 16.9%. The national rate is 12.3%. In addition, the percentage of young people achieving a Level 3 qualification by the age of 19 is significantly lower than the national average and the percentage of young people in Thurrock going to university is still only about half the national average.

**Low attainment:** there is a clear link between poverty and poor educational attainment which is reflected in Thurrock at every key stage of the education cycle. Although there is evidence of recent improvement, the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and the rest is very high.

**Impact of the economic downturn:** The unemployment rate rose from its lowest point of 3.4 per cent in December 2007 to 7.3 per cent in March 2009, and in January 2010 was, at 7.5 per cent, higher than the East of England. This is likely to impact on the numbers of children living in poverty in the borough.

#### 5.2.4: Assessment of services

The Council has put in place a number of strategic programmes to address poor educational attainment, such as the 14-19 Partnership Plan and the Thurrock Learning Partnership's Lifelong Learning Strategy. These have yielded recent improvements in achievement. The Council has invested in projects such as the Gateway Academy, the planned Creative and Cultural Skills and Logistics Sector Skills Academies and the Thurrock Learning Shop and Campus. It is a partner with Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation to drive economic growth and to bring new jobs, housing and investment to the borough.

At local level, multi-agency services are focused on the provision of both universal services and more specialist interventions for vulnerable families. However, limited data exists in relation to the take up of services by families affected by poverty or the outcomes of particular interventions. It is also not evident how far those delivering services are clear about their roles in addressing child poverty.

There is limited evidence to date of consultations or needs analysis undertaken with families most at risk of poverty concerning the types of help needed.

### 6.0: Strategic engagement

The Child Poverty Act requires partner agencies to cooperate to put in place arrangements to work to reduce, and mitigate the effects of, child poverty in their local area.

Whilst this strategy is presented through the Local Authority and Children's Partnership Board, we can only tackle the causes of poverty by working in partnership. A key strand of the implementation plan will be the partnership working that has commenced in the development of this strategy and how we can jointly deliver against the strategic priorities to achieve the reduction in child poverty that is required.

### 7.0: Strategic priorities

A fifth of all children are affected by child poverty in Thurrock, this is unacceptably high. Child poverty is not evenly distributed, but is linked to deep-seated inequalities between different parts of the borough and the existence of a number of pockets of persistent and severe deprivation.

Poverty not only undermines the health, well-being, educational development and life chances of those children directly affected, but impacts also on the community as a whole, whether in terms of well-being and cohesion, the strength of the local economy and the cost to public services. Only by developing a partnership approach with all services and partner agencies working together to reduce and eliminate child poverty within Thurrock can we tackle the complex causes of child poverty.

Child poverty should both inform and be informed by strategic planning at the highest level of the Council. Ideally, it should be embedded within the work and priorities of

the Local Strategic Partnership and the thematic groups and boards which comprise the partnership.

Each of these groups should consider their current strategies and forward work plans in the light of what actions can best address child poverty. This will in turn inform the child poverty action plan for Thurrock.

## 7.1: Priorities

Child poverty exists in all parts of Thurrock, requiring a borough-wide approach, but the need for the most concentrated action exist in the pockets of deprivation where child poverty is considerably higher. In those areas, the challenge is to support children and their families to escape from a long-standing and entrenched cycle of social exclusion and under-achievement. It is recommended that this includes setting localised year on year targets for the reduction of child poverty in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods to bring levels nearer to the borough average.

In such areas is a more concentrated effort is required to reduce health inequalities, to reach and engage young people not in education or training, to improve housing stock and to enable parents who have never worked or who are long-term unemployed, to gain skills and find employment. Transport inequalities – which prevent families from accessing hospitals, or further education facilities, must also be reduced.

Across the UK, entrenched poverty has been found to be highly resistant to conventional public service delivery. There is evidence that an approach which engages local people – as, for example, volunteers, champions or community entrepreneurs – has a higher chance of success, this is in line with the commitment to develop alternative delivery models and consider the commissioning opportunities available.

### Building blocks

The Child Poverty Unit in Government has identified four building blocks for ending child poverty. These include:

**Education, health and family** – ensuring that poverty in childhood does not translate into poor experiences and outcomes

**Housing and neighbourhoods** – ensuring that the child's environment helps them to thrive

**Employment and skills** – ensuring that more families are in work which pays and have support to progress

**Financial support** - ensuring that financial support is responsive to families needs

In line with these building blocks and following the in depth analysis of the key issues the following strategic priorities have been set:

- To increase parental employment and skills by providing access to adult training and skills development through programmes such as the Wishes Adult Skills Programme and progression to adult learning opportunities.
- To increase benefit take up by improving providing high quality advice and guidance targeted to areas where there is a high prevalence of poverty and workless households.
- To reduce attainment gaps between children living in poverty and those who don't by targeting school improvement to those areas and supporting parents to be able to support their children through, for example, adult learning opportunities.
- To reduce the health inequalities faced by some families by developing a targeted, integrated approach to local delivery of services.
- To support the need to prevent homelessness from occurring by addressing the underlying causes of homelessness through effective partnerships, collaboration and the co-ordination of services

The focus of activity will be on those areas with the highest prevalence of child poverty but by developing a broad approach to the eradication of poverty, strategies should move to an overall reduction that supports individuals wherever they live in the Borough

These priorities are consistent with other key strategies in the Borough such as the Children and Young Peoples Plan, the Housing Strategy and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

## 7.2: Delivery of the strategy

The child poverty agenda and an implementation plan must involve locality teams of multi-agency services, children's centres and schools, ensuring that all professionals understand their contribution to reducing child poverty and - where necessary – receive training to do so.

The support of teachers, health professionals and family workers can help to mitigate the effects of poverty, but this can only happen where families are aware of and willing to make use of helping services. Planning and service design will be based on the needs analysis and developed through further consultation with those who are most affected by poverty.

**7.2.1 Strategic Priority 1** – To increase parental employment and skills by providing access to adult training and skills development through the Wishes Programme and progression to adult learning opportunities.

Not working and low pay are key factors in creating poverty in families, this is particularly evident amongst families headed by a lone parent. The partnership created with the Thames Gateway Development Corporation to drive economic growth, create jobs, housing and investment to the area provides Thurrock with a unique opportunity to address unemployment and to increase the opportunities available to local adults.

The Sustainable Community Strategy identifies that improvements in the education and skills of local people alongside job creation and increased economic prosperity are pivotal to providing sustainable opportunities for communities within Thurrock

Thurrock's child poverty aim is to increase parental employment and skills by providing access to adult training and skills development through the Wishes Programme and progression to adult learning opportunities.

To do this we will:

- a) Equip young people with the qualifications they need to compete for the best jobs
- b) Equip people with the skills needed to enter the workforce and maintain employment
- c) Work closely with regeneration projects to support the development of opportunities within local communities
- d) Further develop the Wishes entry to adult learning project

**7.2.2 Strategic Priority 2** - To increase benefit take up by improving providing high quality advice and guidance targeted to areas where there is a high prevalence of poverty and workless households.

The vast majority of children living in poverty have parents who are not in work, with nearly three quarters of children in poverty living in lone parent families. In addition for children living with both parents, just over one third of these families are workless.

The low wage economy in Thurrock and the high number of the working age population with qualifications at level two or below serve to perpetuate the cycle of disadvantage that is often present in families living in poverty.

Increasing benefit take up, particularly in work benefits will reduce the numbers of families living in poverty.

The child poverty strategy aim is to increase benefit take up by improving providing high quality advice and guidance targeted to areas where there is a high prevalence of poverty and workless households.

To do this we will:

- a) Ensure partnership working with key partners such as job centre plus to ensure that advice and guidance on benefit entitlement is available locally.
- b) Develop locality planning that supports a targeted approach to the delivery of advice and guidance to ensure those that need it most have access to it.
- c) To work in partnership to develop financial inclusion amongst families locally.

**7.2.3 Strategic Priority 3** - To reduce attainment gaps between children living in poverty and those who don't by targeting school improvement to those areas and supporting parents to be able to support their children through, for example, adult learning opportunities.

Partnership working with Thames Gateway Development Corporation to drive economic growth and bring new jobs, housing and investment to the Borough will only be successful if local families can access the opportunities available.

To do this we must seek to address the causes of the lack of access to opportunities such as low attainment levels, low skill employment opportunities and lack of adult qualifications. Poor attainment at school is clearly linked to lower attainment in later years and the Key Stage 2 levels, particularly in Maths and English, if not addressed, could continue the cycle of poverty and disadvantage faced by some families.

The Thurrock child poverty aim is to reduce attainment gaps between children living in poverty and those who don't by targeting school improvement to those areas and supporting parents to be able to support their children through, for example, adult learning opportunities.

To do this we will:

- a) Work in partnership with school improvement teams to ensure a whole family approach to raising attainment.
- b) Ensure there is a sufficient supply of early education places.
- c) Give younger children a good head start in education by developing the targeted two year old early education funding offer.
- d) Work in partnership to identify routes into learning opportunities, particularly for families who have not previously achieved a qualification above a level 2.
- e) To work with employers to develop routes into employment for young people
- f) Work in partnership to continue to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training.
- g) Accelerate the achievement and attainment of disadvantaged children and young people.

**7.2.4 Strategic Priority 4** - To reduce the health inequalities faced by some families by developing a targeted, integrated approach to local delivery of services.

The Sustainable Community Strategy sets out the following priority:

‘Provide and commission high quality and accessible services that meet, wherever possible, individual needs.’

By working in partnership the following targets are likely to assist us in addressing the causes and effects of child poverty:

- Reduce inequalities in health and wellbeing
- Support families in need and intervene to protect vulnerable children and adults
- Enable vulnerable people to exercise choice and control
- Change the way we do things to reduce costs and improve choice

Thurrock’s child poverty aim is to reduce the health inequalities faced by some families by developing a targeted, integrated approach to local delivery of services.

To do this we will:

- a) Develop locality based multi agency planning of services
- b) Work closely with partners to improve access to services
- c) Target services to identified needs
- d) Develop opportunities for co located services

**7.2.5 Strategic Priority 5** - To support the need to prevent homelessness from occurring by addressing the underlying causes of homelessness through effective partnerships, collaboration and the co-ordination of services

Thurrock’s Housing Strategy identifies a cross sector need to support the needs of vulnerable groups and the community (p. 34). A priority area within this group of people is the need to prevent homelessness.

The two top causes of homelessness in Thurrock are parental eviction (young people<sup>7</sup>) and violent relationship breakdown (domestic violence). The current recession, rising unemployment and increased debt mean an increase to the numbers of households at risk of losing their homes, which in turn correlate to an increase in deprivation and associated need. Homelessness can be the end result of other problems, i.e. financial, health or social issues. Sustaining homelessness prevention and tackling future homelessness is dependent upon ensuring that homelessness people are able to access services to address these wider issues (p. 37).

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<sup>7</sup> In 2009/10, 30% of those found eligible, unintentionally homelessness and in priority need were young people aged between 16 and 24 and only 9.9% were over 45 and over. P.35 Thurrock’s Housing Strategy 2010 – 2015.

Thurrock's aim in reducing child poverty is:

To support the need to prevent homelessness from occurring by addressing the underlying causes of homelessness through effective partnerships, collaboration and the co-ordination of services.

To do this we will:

- a) Increase prevention methods targeted at youth homelessness;
- b) Extend the use of private sector to provide more settled accommodation;
- c) Extend the availability of affordable housing;
- d) Promoting access to education, employment and training;
- e) Signpost to wider family support.

## 8.0: Next Steps

A detailed implementation plan, setting measurable targets will be developed during April 2011 as the new Children, Education and Families structure is implemented.

## 9.0: Monitoring and evaluation

Data systems should be developed to track the take-up of services by the most disadvantaged families and to evidence the difference which those services are making to the lives of poor families.