

**Briefing note:** Child Poverty on the Isle of Sheppey

**Presented to:** Sheppey Area Committee

**Date:** Tuesday 14 September 2021

**Time:** 7:00pm

## Purpose

The following briefing note provides oversight on the current (and future) provisions in place on the Isle of Sheppey for addressing and actioning rates of child poverty. This report has been specifically produced for Members of the Sheppey Area Committee to update on existing provision as well as to identify gaps in provision. Addressing child poverty is a complex socio-economic issue where a number of constitutive factors apply. As such, this report presents interventions towards alleviating child poverty rather than eradicating.

## Introduction

This briefing note includes measures being taken by Swale Borough Council, as well those of Kent County Council (KCC), local statutory services, and groups/members of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). Early Years and Children's Services are the responsibility of KCC and, as such, they feature prominently throughout this report. All data sets and publicly available records referenced in this briefing are up to date as of Friday 27 August 2021 (please refer to the *References* subheading for further information).

## Low-Income Household Data

There are a total of 4,383 low-income households on the Isle of Sheppey; 3,051 of these households are individuals/families without children. The following table presents data specific to low-income households with 1 or more child on the Isle of Sheppey:

Area	Number of Low-Income Households with Children	Number of Children from Low-Incomes
Isle of Sheppey	1,332	2,744
Ward		
Minster Cliffs	79	160
Queenborough & Halfway	205	447
Sheerness	694	1,470
Sheppey Central	226	420
Sheppey East	128	247

*Data collected from Policy in Practice – LIFT (Low-Income Family Tracker) Dashboards. Please refer to (PiP, 2021) in references for more information.*

## Current Provision

### *Swale Borough Council:*

Swale Borough Council's *Swale Deprivation Action Plan* has been developed to address levels of relative deprivation across the Swale borough through the initiation of cross-cutting and holistic programme delivery. The first action on this action plan is the rollout of digital inclusivity support across the Isle of Sheppey to provide connectivity and digital education to low-income and disadvantaged residents (with a keen emphasis

## Sheppey Area Committee

on providing digital technologies to children from low-income households). A sum of £55,000 has been allocated for the delivery of this first action.

In addressing food poverty amongst Swale families, Swale Borough Council has provided Foodbank Grants (c. £30,000) to each of the major foodbanks stationed across the borough, including Family Foodbank at Seashells in Sheerness. Funding from SBC's Communities Fund (£10,000) has also been allocated towards the Sheppey Support Bus, an initiative run by the Sheppey Community Development Forum and Oasis Charity to delivery food support to low-income families across the Island.

Swale Borough Council is also addressing fuel poverty for residents across Swale through the appointment of a designated Fuel & Water Home Advisor (stationed at Children and Families Ltd.) as well as the workstreams of our Climate Change & Ecological Emergency Project Officers.

Funding from SBC's Improvement & Resilience Fund (£40,000) has also been allocated to Children & Families Ltd. for the delivery of a new one-year pilot project across the Isle of Sheppey aimed towards supporting children aged 0-7 that come from low-income households with essential Early Years provision.

In addition to the newly formed Community Development Team who have a focus on addressing child poverty and tackling levels of relative deprivation, Swale Borough Council are creating new (and strengthening existing) partnerships with a host of local VCSE groups, statutory services, businesses, and community leaders. This networking is establishing communication links between the Council and organisations with a direct focus on child poverty, as well as promoting joint-up inter-linking of external organisations with each other.

### *Kent County Council:*

Through Early Years and Children's Services, KCC distributes action and intervention into rates of child poverty through a number of initiatives (see: KCC, 2021). These are available to families across the Isle of Sheppey and include:

- Free school meals
  - Universally available for all children in Year 2 or below.
  - Available for low-income families for children up to the age of 19.
- Kent Support and Assistance Service (KSAS)
  - Holistic support for low-income families, including food, fuel, finances, home essentials.
  - Home essentials in a crisis service available for emergency situations.
- Early Help (support for families)
  - Educational, emotional, and social needs support available for all children (and their families).
  - Child protection and safeguarding.
  - Child online safety and bullying support.
- Children in Care
  - Adoption, fostering and supported homes support.
- Children's Centres
  - Available for 0-5 years and include extensive childcare services (including training and employability support for parents).
- Youth Hubs
  - Includes support into counselling, early help, child welfare, health & wellbeing.
  - Hubs across the Island, as well as constituted groups that meet in social spaces.
- Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership (KSCMP)
  - Partnership between KCC, NHS and Kent Police.
  - Promoting the welfare of children and run a number of activities and events across the county, including the Swale borough.

### *Statutory Services:*

A number of multi-agency partnerships exist that include groups such as Kent Police, Kent Fire & Rescue Service, NHS, etc. These serve to pull local communications together on child poverty, as well as a host of

## Sheppey Area Committee

additional local and regional initiatives. The Local Children's Partnership Group is the lead partnership in the borough to addressing child poverty. In addition, taskforces (such as NHS One You and Kent Police's county lines workforce) target child poverty and exploitation across the county.

### *Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise Groups:*

A host of groups from the VCS are engaging in addressing and actioning rates of child poverty across the Isle of Sheppey. Ranging from food and utilities support, to autism and underlying disability diagnoses, these groups provide exceptional support to children and their families. A number of Swale Borough Council's Member Grants and internal funds go towards supporting these initiatives.

## Coronavirus Pandemic Provision

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, Central Government and KCC have drawn down allocations of funding specifically designated towards supporting residents impacted by coronavirus. These have included schemes such as:

- Everybody In – Temporary Accommodation Scheme.
- DEFRA Emergency Assistance Grant.
- COVID Winter Grant Scheme.
- KCC Self-Isolation Support Fund.

Whilst not explicitly designed for combatting child poverty, a number of these initiatives have included support to low-income families and ensured children from those homes received food, heating, and household essentials.

## Future Provision

Swale Borough Council is committed to delivering a number of formally adopted strategies that tie into child poverty intervention and actioning. In addition to the *Swale Deprivation Action Plan*, the Council's *Healthy & Active Framework* and *Health & Wellbeing Improvement Plan* continue to engage with children and families. Swale Borough Council's corporate priority of tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone crosscuts a number of service areas and, as such, a host of Officers are addressing child poverty through their individual workstreams.

A number of UK Community Renewal Fund applications were made by groups across Swale. Whilst specifically aimed towards employability and access to training, long-term impacts from these can both directly and indirectly influence rates of child poverty; Swale Borough Council will be supporting groups in receipt of this funding.

A recent conception from KCC is the implementation of community Wi-Fi across areas of Swale where there are heightened levels of relative deprivation. Provision of this community Wi-Fi onto the Isle of Sheppey is in discussion and will be led by KCC over the coming months, tying into their county-wide digital poverty strategy. In addition, roughly 5,000 digital devices are being sourced for distribution to low-income families across Kent, and Swale Borough Council will be in receipt of a proportion of these for donation to Swale families.

## References

PiP, Policy in Practice (2021) *LIFT Dashboard Dataset for Isle of Sheppey Households*. [Electronic Dataset]

Accessed through: <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/>

Last accessed: 26 August 2021.

KCC, Kent County Council (2021) *Education and Children*. [Internet Site]

Available: <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children>

Last accessed: 26 August 2021.