

TO: Family Poverty Core Group
FROM: Anissa Kheratkar, Principal Policy Officer, City Policy
SUBJECT: Family Poverty Strategy 2017-2022 - 12-18 Month Reprioritisation
DATE: December 2020

1.0 Background and context

1.1 The Manchester Family Poverty Strategy 2017-22 was officially launched in October 2017. The Strategy was developed principally to address child poverty in Manchester, which at the time of development was the highest of all of the UK Core Cities. The aim of the Strategy was to add value by identifying a small number of key priorities to have the biggest impact on children and their families.

1.2 The Strategy's three themes, which are underpinned by ten priorities, are listed in the table below:

Sustainable work as a route out of poverty
1. Affordable childcare for parents
2. The role of anchor institutions
Focus on the basics - raising and protecting family incomes
3. Mitigating the impact of welfare reform on families with children
4. Tackling the poverty premium
5. Food and fuel
6. Improving children's health
Boosting resilience and building on strengths
7. Strength based approach in communities (Belonging)
8. Improving the identification and signposting of families in poverty (Coping)
9. Poverty proofing services (Coping)

10. Embedding careers advice and aspiration in schools (Learning)

- 1.3 Since the national lockdown on 23 March 2020, as well as having a substantial and profound economic impact, COVID-19 exacerbated many existing social challenges which have had a disproportionate impact on Manchester's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, young people and older residents.
- 1.4 In light of COVID-19, the Executive agreed to a 'reset' of the Our Manchester Strategy 2016 - 2025 as the overarching vision for the city. This work has included city-wide engagement with residents, organisations and partners to capture key priorities for the Strategy's next five years. Following the reset, many strategies – including the Family Poverty Strategy – may need to be refreshed to reflect these priorities and detail the action that will be taken to achieve them.
- 1.5 In the short term, to ensure that the priorities within the Family Poverty Strategy are still the right ones given the new (inter)national position, the Family Poverty Core Group (who have overarching responsibility for the delivery of the Strategy) agreed to a 12-18 month reprioritisation process. Emerging data discussed in more detail later in the paper highlights that, as well as children and families, young people and older residents in the city have been particularly impacted by COVID-19. However, given that this is a reprioritisation, the priorities for the next 12-18 months will focus on children, young people (up to the age of 19) and families. After this period, it may be that a poverty reduction strategy aimed at all cohorts and not specific to children and their families is developed.
- 1.6 This paper sets out the following:
- Methodology and approach in defining the priorities for the Family Poverty Strategy for the next 12 -18 months
 - Key themes and proposals based on themes
 - Key priorities for the Family Poverty Strategy for the next 12 -18 month
 - Conclusion
 - Next steps
 - Recommendations

2.0 Methodology and approach

- 2.1 As this is not a full refresh of the Family Poverty Strategy, the Family Poverty Core Group agreed that the most effective approach in setting the areas of focus for the next 12 - 18 months was to engage the three working groups. Each of the working groups comprise partners from the statutory, voluntary and community sector who have expertise and specialist knowledge regarding their thematic area, including the Department for Work and Pensions, the 'Bread and Butter Thing' and a number of housing providers. It was felt that these partners were sufficiently diverse and well placed to inform the 12 -18 month review. It was also agreed that any refresh of the

Family Poverty Strategy would require engagement with the city's diverse residents, building on the engagement activity which has recently been undertaken to inform the Our Manchester Strategy reset.

- 2.2 Focussed sessions with each of the working groups were undertaken to identify specific priority areas of focus for 2020 and 2021. The findings of the working groups, together with the findings of the THINK report and other national and local data, were collated and analysed to inform the proposals for the Family Poverty priorities for the next 12 - 18 months.

3.0 Key themes

- 3.1 A number of themes which are pertinent to families living in poverty have emerged from the discussions and findings of the working groups, and national and local data to date. They are detailed in this section.

3.2 Impact of COVID-19 on the economy and residents

- 3.2.1 As widely documented, COVID-19 has had and will continue to have a devastating impact on the economy, the city and its residents. The latest data has indicated that GDP in the UK contracted between 10% and 13% (Economy Scrutiny Committee, 28/08/20). This has had a profound effect locally. Key drivers of Manchester's growth - spatially including the city centre, Manchester Airport, and sectorial the hospitality and culture sectors - have all seen a sharp fall in economic activity. For example, in terms of the city centre footfall, while the footfall was slowly improving from June to September, since approximately mid-October there has been a decline. For instance, the footfall in the week 18 October was down 53% for the same time last year (Sitrep Summary, Economy Scrutiny Committee, 5/11/20).

- 3.2.2 In addition, approximately 32% of jobs in the city are receiving support from the Government's furlough scheme or supported self-employment scheme (Economy Scrutiny Committee, 5/11/20). Whilst the furlough scheme has now been extended till the end of March 2021, it is likely that this has simply put back the date by which we might see another rapid rise in unemployment. For instance, the claimant count for all ages was up from 34,755 in August to 35,230 in September. While the increase was not as sharp an increase as in April and May, it does indicate that unemployment is rising (Office for National Statistics, Sitrep Summary, Economy Scrutiny Committee, 5/11/2020). Given the economic forecasts nationally and locally, this figure is expected to increase plunging even more families into poverty.

3.3 Greater impact on certain wards

- 3.3.1 Whilst every lower super output area (LSOA) in Manchester saw an increase in the Universal Credit claimant count, some wards in the city have been disproportionately impacted. The THINK report indicated that the increase in claimant count was much higher in wards in the city that were employment deprived in the 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation, notably in the north and east of the city. The data also showed disproportionate increases in wards in the city where there are large BAME

communities. Given that Manchester's BAME population on the whole is younger than the rest of the population with more families with children up to the age of 19, there is likely to be an increase in families from these neighbourhoods and communities living in poverty.

3.4 Equalities impact

3.4.1 COVID-19 has amplified systemic inequalities, with a disproportionate impact being seen on communities with one or more protected characteristics. As the Family Poverty Strategy is aimed at families with children up to the age of 19, the equality groups that will have the greatest impact on family poverty as result of COVID-19 are highlighted below:

3.4.2 *Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities* - As well as being more exposed to COVID-19 and twice as likely to die from it compared to the white population, residents from BAME backgrounds also experienced the biggest economic impact. The reasons for this are complex; in part the disproportionate impact can be attributed to the over representation of people from BAME communities working in low paid sectors such as hospitality which have been hit by COVID -19. Again, as the BAME population in Manchester is a younger population than the city's average and includes a greater percentage of children and young people, the economic impact on BAME communities will exacerbate the impact on families living in poverty in the city.

3.4.3 *Young people* – To date, the increase in the unemployment rate in the city has reflected national trends, with rises in unemployment for the 16 to 24-year-old age groups. It is expected that this will continue when the Government's furlough scheme comes to an end, as young people are over-represented in the sectors and occupations most affected by COVID-19, such as hospitality and retail. Many young people may also struggle to enter the labour market for the first time having completed their education and training. This will inevitably include young people up to the age of 19 and as such this will increase the number of this cohort finding themselves in poverty.

3.4.4 *Gender* - COVID-19 has impacted on men and women in different ways. The claimant count to date has indicated that unemployment is impacting more on men. However, from conversations with partners, it is emerging anecdotally that women are leaving the labour market completely in part due to the pressure of trying to balance work and childcare which has become more pressurised since the lockdown. While the analysis of COVID-19 on gender has not taken into account those who are parents or carers of children up to the age of 19, it is highly likely that the impact of unemployment on both men and women of working age will be felt more acutely by those with caring responsibilities.

3.4.5 *Disability* - the prevalence of health conditions that potentially increase risk of COVID-19 infection amongst disabled people, together with the effects of isolation either due to shielding or personal circumstances, have led to raised anxiety and life limiting choices being made in the disabled community. Prior to COVID-19 the data

indicated that disabled people are a third less likely than non-disabled people to be employed and almost a third more likely to live in poverty. While the data around the interplay between disability and economic vulnerability is limited nationally and locally, it is highly likely that, given the health impacts on disabled people, this may affect their ability to both stay in work and to look for work. This will further reduce their employability in a shrinking labour market and inevitably and disproportionately impact on families where one or more parent or carer has a disability.

3.5 Given the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on residents with protected characteristics, the Core Group agreed that equality, diversity and inclusion should be a cross cutting theme across all of the family poverty work and priorities. They also agreed that any measures to tackle poverty should be more focussed on these cohorts and in those wards in the city that have been the worst affected.

3.6 Greater need for strategic alignment

3.6.1 There was a consensus amongst the working groups that the existing Family Poverty Strategy does not sufficiently capture the work being undertaken across the Council to improve the life outcomes for residents and therefore there was a risk of duplication. As well as the Family Poverty work, there are a number of strategies and areas of work that are being undertaken across the city that will have an impact on tackling poverty, as detailed below.

3.6.2 *Work and Skills Offer* - The single biggest factor in lifting children out of poverty is if one or more people in their households are employed and earning the living wage. The Work and Skills Strategy is currently being refreshed with a greater focus on promoting and implementing long term sustainable solutions to supporting residents out of poverty. This includes a focus on digital inclusion which, as highlighted from the intelligence emerging from the pandemic, is an even greater issue for the city's most vulnerable residents. Therefore, going forward it is imperative that the priorities set out in the Work and Skills Strategy are targeted at families with children living in poverty in those areas of the city where poverty is most pronounced.

3.6.3 *The Manchester Adult Education and Skills Plan* - Complimenting the Work and Skills offer, the Manchester Adult Education and Skills Plan, launched earlier this year, recognises learning as a route out of poverty and sets out the ambition to ensure that all of the city's residents have the skills and education they need to get into and benefit from good quality, well-paid work. As such, to support families out of poverty, it is important that adult learning is aligned to the Family Poverty Strategy.

3.6.4 *Recovery planning* - since the lockdown, work has been undertaken to plan for the city's recovery with a renewed focus on the city's economy, residents and communities. Four workstreams are being progressed to prepare for the recovery. These are highly interdependent with each other, with each workstream involving a significant portfolio of work. The workstreams are:

- Economy
- Residents and Communities
- Impact on the Council / Future Council

- Health and Social Care

Underpinned by:

- Evidence base and impact for each of the above workstreams
- External relationships with a range of key partners
- Reset of the Our Manchester Strategy

It is important that any learning from this work is considered within the reprioritisation, and that the recovery work considers how it can support residents in poverty.

- 3.6.5 *Manchester Children's and Young People's Plan 2020 -2024* - Led by the Children's Board, the purpose of the Plan is to ensure that all children enjoy a safe, happy, healthy and successful future. The Plan includes a focus on children's health, as well as other priority areas. One of the priorities in the existing Family Poverty Strategy is around improving children's health. Given that this priority is being led by the Children's Board, it is proposed that to avoid duplication and to ensure consistency, this priority remains with the Children's Board and is aligned to the Family Poverty Strategy via the Children's Services representative on the Core Group.
- 3.6.6 As highlighted above, considerable work is being undertaken across a whole range of policy areas to tackle poverty in some way. Therefore, it is important that the Family Poverty Strategy is aligned and consistent with the Council's and city's strategic thinking and priorities. Over the next few weeks, the Core Group will consider how best to support the alignment of the various programmes of work so that there is particular focus on families living in poverty and, in doing so, a more joined up and effective approach to tackling it.
- 3.7 Cross cutting priorities - there was a recognition that the existing priorities are interdependent and that in the post-COVID landscape, the three working groups need to collaborate closely to look at issues of Family Poverty more holistically, as families are affected with multiple issues which range across the objectives and priorities of the groups. The existing Strategy is divided into three themes with three working groups aligned to each of the themes. Removing the themes would require a substantial change to the governance structure. Given that the Family Poverty Strategy needs to align with the refreshed Our Manchester Strategy, it is not advisable to change the existing structure at this juncture. Any significant change to the governance would have to be part of the full refresh of the Family Poverty Strategy. To better align the priorities across the three working groups for the next 12 to 18 months, there needs to be a renewed focus on collaboration between the working groups via the chairs' joint membership of the Core Group and through regular catch ups between the chairs in between Core Group meetings.
- 3.8 Communications – Given the impact of COVID 19 on the economy and residents living in poverty, the working groups felt that it was even more critical that the support offer available to families is promoted both widely and extensively and in a format that is most accessible to the city's diverse residents. One of the key challenges highlighted by the pandemic is that many of the city's most vulnerable residents are either unaware of the support available to them and/ or are digitally excluded and therefore do not have the means or the skills needed to access the support available.

- 3.8.1 To improve the overall awareness of the support, offer so that it is better promoted, it is recommended that the membership of the working groups is extended to include the Strategic Neighbourhood leads. This will improve awareness and subsequently the promotion of the support offer/s available to residents in the different neighbourhoods. It will also allow for the sharing of intelligence about the different neighbours and the working groups, thus providing a more complete picture about the needs of individual neighbourhoods to inform priority setting. Linked to this, it is also proposed that the support offer to families living in poverty is targeted at neighbourhood level and informed by how different communities in neighbourhoods prefer to receive information to improve accessibility and effectiveness. As mentioned, digital exclusion is a particular challenge for some of the city's most vulnerable residents, therefore it is proposed that where feasible and appropriate (and consistent with whatever social distancing measures are in place at the time) hard copy leaflets and face to face advice is offered to those residents who can only access information via these methods.
- 3.8.2 As Neighbourhood Officers are responsible for communications and engagement activity at a neighbourhood level, it is proposed that they take responsibility for promoting the support offer and that this is aligned with Neighbourhood teams as part of the Bringing Services Together programme. To further strengthen this approach, it is also recommended that there is a particular focus on those neighbourhoods where there are the highest concentrations of families living in poverty.
- 3.8.3 Communications activity currently sits with the resilience working group, although communications activity is undertaken across all three of the working groups. To strengthen the overall approach to communications and to ensure that there is consistency and alignment across all of the activities undertaken in respect of family poverty, it is proposed that communications is a standing item at core group meetings over the next 12-18 months. Further to this, it is proposed that a comprehensive communications strategy which underpins the entire Family Poverty Strategy work is then developed as part of a future refresh of the Family Poverty Strategy.

4.0 Family Poverty Strategy priorities for the next 12-18 months

- 4.1 A review of the Family Poverty Strategy by the working groups indicated that the themes and priorities in the existing strategy are even more pertinent to meeting the needs of children and their families living in poverty. As such, as well as the particular impact of COVID-19 on the city's most vulnerable residents outlined above, it is proposed that the themes and priorities in the existing strategy are continued and strengthened together with a small number of additional priorities as set out below:

4.2 Theme One - Sustainable work as a route out of poverty

4.3 Affordable, flexible and high quality childcare

- 4.3.1 In the existing Strategy, affordable, flexible and high quality childcare was identified as the vehicle for many parents to access work, as it was recognised that well paid

and sustainable work was the best way of increasing household incomes and moving families out of poverty. The working group overwhelmingly agreed that the childcare offer will be even more important going forward. Since the lockdown measures, school and childcare / day care settings closed for all but key workers and vulnerable children. While the full impact of COVID-19 on childcare settings is yet to be fully understood, what is becoming increasingly clear is that many childcare settings, in the main small and medium sized businesses, are struggling to survive. This will inevitably impact on the childcare offer in terms of affordability, flexibility and potentially quality. In addition, it was recognised that given the challenges around childcare, the greatest impact would be felt by those furthest away from the labour market, thus exacerbating existing inequalities.

- 4.3.2 As access and the subsequent take-up of childcare is linked to the school readiness agenda, it is important that the work of the working group is aligned with that of the Children's Board as discussed to ensure that there is a consistent approach to addressing early years education.
- 4.3.3 Going forward, there will need to be a greater focus on supporting childcare providers to keep their businesses afloat in order to lessen the impact on working parents looking to return to work; as well encouraging those parents, who are looking to access work for the first time. In addition, as highlighted in the paper, given that some communities/ groups have been disproportionately impacted by COVID 19 such as BAME groups, it is proposed that there is a greater focus on supporting these communities to access and take up childcare and thus better support them to take up any potential employment opportunities.

4.4 Anchor institutions

- 4.4.1 Anchor institutions have been identified as having a significant role in helping the city to tackle poverty given their size, budgets and the fact that they are rooted in the city. Since the launch of the Strategy, a series of breakfast events and seminars were organised over an 18-month period with each one linked to promoting social inclusion and social value objectives in some way. Following the lockdown, the work with anchor institutions has paused. However, given the significant impact of COVID-19 on the economy, the group agreed that post COVID -19, anchors will need to play a major role in creating good quality employment and careers for parents and young people living in poverty, directly and through their supply chains.
- 4.4.2 A number of anchor institutions are committed to and deliver social value. For instance, Manchester City Council is currently refreshing its Social Value Policy to better include the groups adversely impacted by the pandemic namely young people, BAME residents and the over 50's. It will also look for its supply chain and partners to do the same. However, given the impact of COVID 19 on many anchor institutions themselves, it is proposed that the more traditional anchors together with those anchor institutions who have previously engaged with the anchor's seminars are initially targeted to lead on social value.

4.5 City wide commitment to social value and good employment – In addition to the focus on anchors, the group also agreed that as part of the recovery of the city and ‘to build back better’, there should be a city wide commitment for employers in the city to promote and champion social value in the widest sense. Therefore, to consolidate and enhance the existing work in the city around social value, it is proposed that there is a specific city-wide commitment to the following:

- *The Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter* – In January 2020, the GM Good Employment Charter was launched. The charter consists of 7 characteristics of good employment which include secure work, flexible work and the Real living Wage. It is proposed that there is a commitment to championing and actively promoting the GM Manchester Good Employment Charter to employers across the city with the key anchors in the city leading the way.
- *Manchester as a Living Wage Place* - The living wage has been identified as key to lifting children and their families out of poverty. In November 2019 during living wage week, Manchester City Council became a living wage employer. While COVID -19 has presented many challenges to employers, given the huge economic impact, it is now even more important that as a city there is an even greater effort to support the most vulnerable in the city and to try and prevent even more families falling into poverty. As such, it is recommended that the city renews its commitment to becoming a Living Wage City and works with its key anchors and other employers in the city to achieve this.

4.6 Additional priority – Work and Skills community based provision - In addition to strengthening the existing priorities, Work and Skills community based provision was identified as a specific priority. As discussed, the most effective route out of poverty is for the city’s residents to be in jobs which pay the living wage. The existing Strategy does not reference specific work initiatives and employment support offers. A key focus of the refreshed Work and Skills Strategy is to support residents furthest away from the labour market to gain employment. Considerable work is being undertaken across the city to meet this objective. This includes a network of 30 work clubs in community settings across the city which provide residents with employability skills training together with other support packages to help remove barriers to employment such as childcare. Going forward, it is proposed that the work and skills community provision is better targeted in areas of the city where there are the greatest concentrations of families living in poverty.

5.0 Theme Two - Focus on the basics – raising and protecting family incomes

5.1 Lobbying role - Mitigating the impact of welfare reforms on families with children

5.2 As discussed, COVID-19 has seen a significant rise in Universal Credit (UC) claimants and this is likely to increase based on the national and local forecasts. The group’s ability to mitigate the impact of welfare reforms is limited without a change in welfare rights legislation and / or significant funding to help residents in poverty. A more pragmatic way forward is for the group to utilise the intelligence that is collated

around the rise in UC claims and other poverty impact measures shared at the Welfare Reform Board, and use this as evidence to provide to the Core Group to lobby Government for additional resources and policy. For example, a Lords Committee is leading on a campaign urging the government to make permanent the £20 a week increase in universal credit to support those most in need and prevent even more families falling into poverty. It is precisely this type of campaign that the Family Poverty group should support as part of its lobbying role.

5.3 Tackling the poverty premium

5.4 As described, the impact of COVID-19 will mean more residents living in poverty, some for the first time. Therefore, supporting residents with everyday household goods will be even more critical. Thus, it is imperative that the current focus on tackling the poverty premium is continued with a greater emphasis on promoting ethical alternatives to rent and buy. This will involve working in collaboration with the sustainable work as a route out of poverty working group (who lead on the work with anchors) to further develop relationships and lobby business and providers to promote the social value benefits of supporting residents living in poverty.

5.5 Food poverty

5.5.1 A key priority of the working group was to support residents experiencing food poverty. Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the immediate focus from the Council and other agencies was a coordinated food response to support the most vulnerable residents in the city during the lockdown period.

5.5.2 The issue of food poverty is highly complex. The long-term impacts of COVID-19 are unclear now that there is a second wave. Although it is likely that the effects of the pandemic will be far-reaching and significant for many; as the country enters recession, this will compound current food insecurity problems facing many families. It will also increasingly affect people in precarious work or lower income jobs who might previously have been considered "food secure". Recent Food Foundation research demonstrates that nationally England has already seen a four-fold rise in the number of food insecure adults - which reflects in the number of food insecure families with children. At present the Council is supporting approximately 144 households who need food support.

5.5.3 In addition, industry leaders are already predicting food shortages as a result of Brexit, presenting further long-term challenges for individuals and families already in poverty. At present, it is estimated that less than 10% of the edible food that is wasted within the UK food industry is unlocked and fed to people. Therefore, to better meet the food needs of residents, companies need to re-evaluate their waste policies and consider the impact that they could achieve - socially, economically and environmentally.

5.5.4 The Strategy previously focussed on mapping and strengthening food support offers across the city. Going forward, the most economically viable and sustainable route is to work with food redistribution organisations that can unlock the surplus food within

their industry, actively building community relationships for the factories and their workforce.

5.5.5 Positive relationships with food providers have been established during COVID-19 and thus it is proposed that these are continued and strengthened via the following work:

- Procurement - It is proposed that the donation of edible food surplus to the city's third sector food organisations is embedded in the accountability requirements of all Council approved suppliers from across the food industry. In addition, those that have food suppliers as part of their supply chain could be asked to encourage donations.
- Enlist anchor institutions - consistent with the procurement approach set out above, all of Manchester's major anchor institutions as part of their role in tackling poverty will be encouraged to have effective systems for distributing their waste as part of their supply chain and that of their suppliers.
- Local business surplus - it is proposed that the basics groups encourages its partners which include FairShare and The Bread and Butter to influence Manchester organisations involved in the food industry to open up donations.

5.6 Fuel poverty

5.6.1 As well as food poverty, fuel poverty will continue to be a priority for all the reasons discussed. Thus it is proposed that the group focus on identifying resources to try to improve the energy efficiency of homes. This includes a commitment by the Council as part of its recovery planning to fund a housing retrofit programme which would improve energy efficiency while reducing carbon emissions. Neighbourhood Services who oversee enforcement will be recruited to the working group to support this objective.

5.6.2 To prepare for a potential second peak of the virus over the winter months when fuel poverty is likely to be a particular challenge for families, it is proposed that the group undertake specific activities to support families living in fuel poverty. This work has started with the publication of a leaflet advising residents living in fuel poverty on how they can access support. The leaflet will be distributed in wards in the city where there are the highest concentrations of families living in poverty.

5.7 Additional priorities In addition to strengthening the existing priorities for the basics work stream, the following priorities have been identified:

5.8 Debt and financial management

5.8.1 Debt is a significant issue for some of the city's poorest residents. As more of the city's residents find themselves out of work, or for those on low incomes and /or those whose incomes vary due to job unpredictability, financial problems and rising debt will become even more of a challenge. Thus, it is important that there is a focus on promoting access to affordable credit so that people in poverty are not paying a financial penalty for borrowing money to make ends meet which in turn will plunge them into further debt and greater poverty.

5.9 Other support offers

- 5.9.1 Residents in poverty continue to face challenges across a whole host of areas and need practical support with this. For instance, there is anecdotal evidence to show that the cost of “badged” school uniforms is a significant challenge for families living in poverty and this is going to get worse in the current climate. As such, it is proposed that where feasible and appropriate, the group continues to provide practical support to residents with issues such as this. Again, it is recommended that families living in parts of the city with the highest levels of deprivation are targeted for support.

6.0 Theme Three - Boosting Resilience and Building on Strengths

- 6.1 The consensus of the group was that lockdown and the subsequent closure of a number of support services highlighted the need to both continue and enhance the support offer to residents and to better promote these offers. Thus, the existing priorities continue to be important and are set below:

6.2 Strength based approaches in communities (belonging) - Early Help (EH) provision and links to local support

- 6.2.1 Given the impact of COVID-19 on certain communities as highlighted, it is proposed that this intelligence together with intelligence captured via the Early Help COVID-19 survey is used to better target resources to those residents who are most in need in order to inform the allocation of resources and service provision.

6.3 Improving the identification and sign posting of families living in poverty (Coping)

- 6.3.1 As discussed, communications is pivotal to promoting the support offer to residents in need. It is recommended that in order to improve the effectiveness of any communications around poverty, it is neighbourhood focused and is developed based on how different communities like to access information. This will be picked up by Neighbourhood Officers who over the COVID-19 crisis used the intelligence from the community and food response to link local services to vulnerable residents and therefore are well placed to lead in this area.

- 6.3.2 As widely documented, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on school provision and children in the city, particularly for those children living in poverty. It is therefore critical that the Early Help virtual schools offer is part of the communications activity aimed at families living in poverty. Again, as described, this should be promoted by Neighbourhood Officers in those wards with the highest concentration of families living in poverty. In addition, it is proposed that the Early Help Virtual Schools Offer is strengthened and enhanced to include a wider universal offer which includes support and information in relation to general health, mental health, trauma informed practice, and wider schools’ inclusion work, to give residents a much needed holistic support offer to address multiple needs.

6.4 Embedding careers advice and aspiration in schools (Learning)

- 6.4.1 Again school closures have had a significant impact on all children, their learning and mental health. Most notably, it is widely documented that the impact of school

closures will be felt most acutely by children from deprived backgrounds who will have experienced a greater dip in their learning thus widening the attainment gap between them and children from well off backgrounds. As children returned to schools (many for the first time in over five months), the initial focus of schools was to support children with their emotional well-being and support them to catch up with the curriculum. However, in the longer term, if the city is to tackle the attainment gap between children from different socio-economic backgrounds, then it is imperative that promoting aspiration via careers support is part of the schools offer. The impact of COVID-19 will refocus the need for access to quality employer interventions including mentoring, accurate labour market intelligence and work experience, particularly for more vulnerable young people. It is highly likely that these programmes and interventions will be organised differently post COVID-19 and will be shaped by the capacity of individual businesses to offer support. Work is currently being undertaken jointly by the Council's Work and Skills team and Children's Services to promote and embed careers advice and aspirations in schools. Once again, it is important that this work is not unnecessarily duplicated, and that the family poverty work is aligned with this.

6.5 Additional priorities – in addition, to the existing priorities, the group identified a small number of new ones as set out below.

6.6 Digital Inclusion

6.6.1 COVID- 19 highlighted just how important digital skills and access to digital tools are in being able to carry out everyday tasks. The pandemic also highlighted that being digitally excluded impacted more acutely on those most in need. As such, it is proposed that digital inclusion is included as a priority for the basics group. There is a city wide policy to address and tackle digital exclusion and therefore to avoid duplication and to ensure that the work going forward is aligned, it is recommended that the basics group keep abreast of the wider work taking place across the city to promote digital inclusion.

6.7 Maximising access to the benefits system

6.7.1 There is evidence to indicate that a significant number of families do not access all the financial support they are entitled to and therefore they and their children are financially worst off. There are a number of reasons for this, in part this can be explained by the complexity of the benefits system which too many residents find difficult to navigate. To help address this, it is proposed that the information setting out the different benefits aimed at children and families together with details of who is entitled to which benefit and how these can be accessed is pulled together. It is also proposed that this information is communicated in a way that is accessible and is aimed at those communities and in those wards, who need it the most as described. As such, it is recommended that the resilience working group collaborate with communications to develop discuss and agree how this may support offer is developed.

6.8 Holistic support offer for residents

6.8.1 As well as support with accessing benefits, families living in poverty invariably need support across a number of areas which are often uncoordinated and again difficult

to navigate. To support residents to access help more effectively, it is proposed that the work previously undertaken by the basics working group to bring different organisations providing different support offers together is accelerated with the resilience group working with communications colleague to design this. It is also proposed that organisations across the statutory, voluntary and community sector continue to share intelligence via their respective working groups to advise on the needs of residents and inform the design of the support offer.

6.9 Workforce support - As a key employer in the city, the group believed that it was important for the Council as part of its civic leadership role, to set an example to other employers by providing good pay and conditions for its staff. As such, the resilience working group included workforce support as part of their brief. Prior to COVID-19, the group looked at how to support some of the lowest paid Council employees who may themselves be experiencing poverty. Some progress was made with a managers' toolkit developed with HR/OD colleagues to help managers identify members of their teams who may be experiencing poverty and how best to support them. Given the potential impact of job losses in the city and the impact this will inevitably have on Council staff and their families, it is proposed that this work is developed further with Council staff and contracted services.

6.9.1 It is also proposed that all the organisations involved in the Family Poverty work, key anchor institutions and their respective supply chains are actively encouraged to promote a similar offer with their employees in order to improve outcomes for all of the city's diverse residents and in doing so, help tackle family poverty.

7.0 Family Poverty Strategy – Themes and priorities for the next 12-18 months

7.1 Based on the proposals discussed in this paper, the table below sets out the themes and priorities for the next 12-18 months:

Sustainable work as a route out of poverty
1. Affordable childcare for parents
2. The role of anchor institutions
<i>Additional Priorities</i>
3. Manchester as a living Wage Place
4. City wide commitment to good employment practices
Focus on the basics - raising and protecting family incomes

5. Lobbying Government to mitigate the impact of welfare reforms on children and families
6. Tackling the poverty premium
7. Food and fuel
<i>Additional Priorities</i>
8. Debt and financial management
Boosting resilience and building on strengths
9. Strength based approach in communities (Belonging)
10. Improving the identification and signposting of families in poverty (Coping)
11. Poverty proofing services (Coping)
12. Embedding careers advice and aspiration in schools (Learning)
<i>Additional Priorities</i>
13. Digital Inclusion
14. Maximising access to the benefits system
15. Holistic support offer for residents
16. Workforce support

8.0 Poverty Impact Assessment

8.1 Manchester City Council intends to undertake a Poverty Impact Assessment alongside an Equality Impact Assessment on next year's budget options to ensure

that the budget does not disproportionately impact on the city's most vulnerable residents as far as possible.

9.0 Development of metrics

- 9.1 Once the priorities set out in this paper are agreed, a set of metrics will be developed against each of the priorities to measure their effectiveness in tackling poverty. The analysis will be used to assess progress against the priorities and will be used to inform future priority setting of the Strategy.

10.0 Governance

- 10.1 As this a 12 -18 month strategy and the priorities are broadly similar to the existing Strategy, it makes sense for the governance arrangements to remain the same. However, given that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on certain communities as described, it is vital that the composition of the Core Group better reflects these communities so that policy interventions are evidence based and more likely to be effective. As such, it is proposed that further work is undertaken to recruit diverse members from the Voluntary and Community sector.

11.0 Conclusion

- 11.1 As highlighted in the paper, COVID-19 has had an immeasurable impact on the city's poorest and most vulnerable residents exposing systemic inequalities. As the full economic impact becomes increasingly stark, it is inevitable that poverty will increase and even more of the city's residents will find themselves living in poverty, some for the first time.
- 11.2 A reset of the Our Manchester Strategy is currently being undertaken. All other strategies need to be consistent and aligned to the Our Manchester Strategy as it sets out the overarching vision in the city. However, given the impact of COVID-19 on the city's poorest residents, it is imperative that the priorities set out in the existing strategy for the next 12 - 18 months are ambitious, achievable and continue to meet the needs of families living in poverty prior to any refresh of the Family Poverty Strategy.
- 11.3 The consultation with each of the working groups has indicated that in the main the themes and priorities in the existing Family Poverty Strategy are still very relevant. To better meet the needs of people living in poverty, it is recommended that they are strengthened going forward together with a small number of additional priorities as described. In addition, given the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on certain communities and wards, it is proposed that priorities in the Strategy are focussed on these communities and in those wards which has seen the greatest impact and that this is done via targeted engagement and communications activity.
- 11.4 While the proposals outlined in this paper are intended to tackle poverty in the city, we are living in uncharted territory. Given the unpredictability of COVID-19 as the country and the city moves in and out of more stringent/ more relaxed lockdown

measures, this will inevitably have an adverse impact on the city, its economy and ultimately its communities. Thus it is important that, over the next 6 to 12 months in particular, there is a degree of flexibility in the work around family poverty so it continues to be responsive to the existing needs and any significant emerging needs of the city's most vulnerable families.

12.0 Next Steps

- 12.1 Following the implementation of the priorities set out in this paper over the next 12 - 18 months, analysis will be undertaken to measure their effectiveness in meeting the needs of residents living in poverty. At this time, the current terms of the Family Poverty Strategy will have, the Our Manchester Strategy will be complete and the Manchester Poverty Truth Commission (whose foundations are developing policy proposals based on lived experience of poverty) will have published their findings (due end of March 2021).
- 12.2 In addition, it is anticipated that in 12-18 months' time the current social distancing measures may no longer be in place, thus it may be possible to build on the engagement activity undertaken for the Our Manchester Strategy Reset and carry out a comprehensive consultation with the city's diverse residents to build a more sustained relationship with our communities. As such, it makes sense to undertake the full refresh of the Family Poverty Strategy after this period so that it is best positioned to meet the needs of the city's poorest and most vulnerable residents.

13.0 Recommendations

- 13.1 The Core Group are asked to note the contents of this report, the proposed strengthening of existing and additional priorities, and the next steps. In particular, the Group is asked to agree:
- The embedding of equality, diversity and inclusion as a cross cutting theme;
 - The use of communications and engagement to inform the design and delivery of measures to tackle poverty;
 - The alignment of family poverty work and priorities to the key areas of work being undertaken in the city to tackle poverty, particularly in relation to digital inclusion;
 - Greater collaboration between the working groups to better align priorities across the Family Poverty Strategy; and
 - For the communications activity to be neighbourhood focussed and targeted at those communities and wards most impacted by COVID-19.