

# Child Poverty Forum West Cumbria

## CHILD POVERTY:

Moving from a Transactional to Relational Approach  
to Meet the Needs of Families



### A REPORT OF A ROUNDTABLE EVENT HELD

Friday 21st June 2019

Samuel Lindow Building, Westlakes Science and Technology Park, Moor Row, Cumbria CA24 3JY

**Child Poverty Forum  
West Cumbria**



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Compiled and edited by Suzanne Wilson (University of Central Lancashire), Willie Slavin (West Cumbria Child Poverty Forum) and Ian Hinde (Allerdale Borough Council).

## Foreword

Having welcomed everyone to the Seminar, the Chair, Aiden Worsley, recalled the beginnings of the West Cumbria Child Poverty Forum (WCCPF) and noted that among the founding members were all those organisations represented around the table today. In a real sense, what we are doing here is not breaking new ground, but going back to our roots. We can look back with a sense of satisfaction at what was achieved up to the point where austerity cut into everyone's budget with far reaching consequences. You just need to track how the statistics of child poverty have gone in that time. Ground was made and is now lost.

What was clear from the start was that tackling poverty is not something one organisation can do on its own. It does not matter how good you are, you cannot do it. It must be a multi-agency activity, which requires 360 degrees of activity around a family living with the consequences of poverty.

Our report *Child Poverty: The Impact of Poor Housing on Children's Life Chances*, emanated from a chance remark at a previous roundtable event and impelled us to develop a clearer understanding of the key issues around the provision of social housing and, critically, what good housing has to contribute to the long-term life chances of vulnerable children. Dr Kaz Stewart's (University of Cumbria) introduction highlighted the best research insight into the effect of poor housing on children's wellbeing that affects them for the rest of their lives. Quality housing undoubtedly has a critically important contribution to make to helping children to get out of poverty.

It is important to emphasise that one of the things that did become obvious in the course of our conversations was that social housing landlords suffered the same pressures from austerity as everybody else. Every service has been cut to the bone and reduced to a transactional level in an area where a relational engagement is most effective.

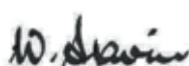
From a WCCPF perspective, we are offering today an opportunity for re-engagement by Housing Associations with both statutory and third sector children's services who actively participate within the Forum. We are happy to invite each Housing Association to appoint a Child Poverty Champion and join our list of those who receive a monthly bulletin from WCCPF, which seeks to keep people up to date with current thinking, literature and data around child poverty.

The Forum can be a resource to providers who wish to pursue the issue of child poverty within their respective organisations, both as a source of information but also as a mediating link between the key service providers at Cumbria County Council's Children's Services and to Barnardo's and Howgill our local service providers. A housing association with a family in need will almost certainly find that that family is already known to at least one of these service providers. A collaborative approach immediately becomes a possibility.

Ultimately, we would like every public service organisation to adopt a strategic approach to the needs of children living in poverty. We are happy to offer assistance in developing a strategic process.

As a footnote, we would wish to record our thanks to all those agencies who contributed to fulfilling our pledge to follow up on the key issues raised in the report. It is gratifying to witness the goodwill generated by participants in their positive, honest and co-operative dialogue based upon a better understanding of the damaging experience of the effects of austerity across the board.

The commitment of all agencies in attendance to continue this promising conversation is sufficiently strong to allow the West Cumbria Child Poverty Forum to conclude this piece of work and observe developments from the sidelines. We do so with our sincerest thanks and good wishes to all concerned.



Willie Slavin  
Chair of West Cumbria Child Poverty Forum

## Background and Context

### **History of West Cumbria Child Poverty Forum**

The Forum exists to highlight and improve the plight of those children in our community who live with the harmful consequences of poverty. The WCCPF came together in response to a growing concern, voiced in Parliament by the then MP Jamie Reed about the incidence of child poverty in the local community.

This led to the publication of a *Review of Child Poverty in West Cumbria* in November 2010. The report, well received at the time, particularly in the public and voluntary sectors, has recently been updated to take account of the continuing economic downturn and the effects of welfare reform. It is a matter of the greatest concern that gains made over recent years in redressing the balance have gone into worrying reverse. For those agencies who make up the Forum's membership, and who have sought to grasp the complexity of the problem as a prerequisite of transformative action, the group's engagement with University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) and their Applied Policy Science Unit is proving immensely valuable.

The developing interest in action research among constituent organisations, able and willing to promote postgraduate study, is taking this particular collaboration to another level.

### **Who we are**

WCCPF is an un-constituted group of professionals from a range of sectors, who meet periodically to share information surrounding child poverty on a local, national and international level. There is representation from Allerdale and Copeland Borough Councils, Cumbria County Council Children's Services, Howgill Family Centre, Barnardo's Allerdale, UCLan and Impact Housing.

### **What we do**

The aim of the Forum is to share information and expertise and raise the profile of child poverty in West Cumbria, keeping the issue at the forefront of the public and the statutory services. The Forum is purposefully open and unincorporated.

### **Context**

Following a series of conferences and roundtable events hosted by UCLan, and the Forum's growing relationship with the research being undertaken at UCLan, it was felt timely to capture salient issues surrounding child poverty in West Cumbria. This was done through discussions with local stakeholders, which supplements statistical reports produced by organisations such as Cumbria Community Foundation and Cumbria Observatory.

The Centre of Citizenship and Community have been actively involved in WCCPF since Suzanne Wilson joined the team in 2017. Chaired by Willie Slavin, the WCCPF exists to ensure that child poverty remains high on the agenda of every service that works with vulnerable families.

### **Purpose of the report**

Social housing, in the context of child poverty, is a primary issue for WCCPF and emerged from a Roundtable event in 2017, prompting this latest event, which sought to explore the benefits of collaborative working between professionals from the housing and family service agencies.

The event on the impact of housing on children's well-being was held on 21st June 2019 at UCLan's West Lakes Campus, bringing together local authorities, housing associations, children's services and academics to explore collaborative ways to work together in the best interests of the most vulnerable children. The event was attended by Sue Hayman MP (Workington) and endorsed by Trudy Harrison MP (Copeland). Aidan Worsley, Professor of Social Work at UCLan chaired the event, and Dr Julian Manley, Social Innovation Manager at UCLan, ignited delegates' imaginations about the 'Preston Model' and co-operative working, which had been highlighted at the original Roundtable. The event resulted in a number of positive actions being pledged by all parties involved. Events such as this illustrate how the university works collaboratively to benefit local communities.



**From left to right: Suzanne Wilson, Aidan Worsley, Sue Hayman, Willie Slavin**

## Summary of Speakers Contributions

A group of stakeholders and expert practitioners operating in West Cumbria were invited to contribute to the event, outlining the main challenges they face in working with vulnerable children in West Cumbria, and how they are attempting to overcome this. These are the inputs as delivered on the day.

### **Sue Hayman: MP for Allerdale**

"You sent me the [Child Poverty: The Impact of Poor Housing on Children's Life Chances] report some time ago, which I read, and I was so impressed with it that I sent it on to John Healey who is our Shadow Housing Minister, and he is using it as part of what we, in the Labour Party, are developing because there is some good stuff in here.



One of the things that is really important is we know that we have too many children in West Cumbria living in poverty. We know that. Moreover, the figures I have here is that in Allerdale, around 13% of children are in low-income households, 14% in Copeland, so it is much the same right across. We know that many of those households, the majority of them, also suffer from fuel poverty, which is also something that we need to be really tackling. We also know there is a strong correlation between people and children in poverty and social housing; we know that the two are linked.

One of the Labour Party's approaches with its housing policy is to look at how we can ensure that everybody has access to good quality, affordable housing, because it just simply is not happening at the moment. We know that the Government produced a Social Housing Green Paper; we believe it fell well short of what is needed because we do have a real crisis in this country at the moment. I see it in my surgeries and Lesley Sanczuk and the people from the housing associations will get letters from me about people who are struggling to get the house that they need. I know you do not have enough resources, so we are pretty stuck unless something radical happens. We also know that the number of social houses that are being rented at the moment are at an all-time low, and that reflects both the amount and quality of the stock.

It is important that we get a good plan of how we are going to tackle this, and we crack on to it. This report talks about the major impact that poor housing has on children's health. I know that children have more respiratory problems and one of the things I hear when people come to see me is the problem of damp. It does have an effect on children's health, and that then has a knock-on effect on their education. Their life chances, as the report shows, get affected all the way through, and if you then have a lower education, you are less likely to get a decent job, and so the cycle continues. Therefore, we have to break this, and good housing is the key to it.

Labour have produced a paper called Housing For The Many, because at the moment we do not have housing for many. Our housing stock has gone down and down, and there has not been any proper attention paid to social housing, pushing people into private rented housing that is often poor quality.

It is important that do we want the housing associations, councils, to be able to build houses again. At the moment that is just not happening and Government has not made it possible. We believe that if you want

to build more houses you should be able to do so. It is the housing associations and the local councils who manage those homes and they should be setting the standards that they can see that their tenants want and have a right to.

The Government's current definition of affordable homes does not really work and needs to be re-examined. One of the things that we are suggesting is that the term 'affordable housing' should be linked to local incomes, so that it generally reflects what should be affordable in that area. We also want to stop the sale of social rented homes until there are sufficient available. There are around 50,000 homes a year, social housing homes, that are still sold on. If you do not have a system of replacing those homes, all you are doing is reducing the affordable housing stock again. We need to have a proper sensible approach to how we actually manage that. I always believe strongly that our planning system does not work in favour for what we need to achieve as well. The developers have too much control over what is built and where it is built and how it is built, and actually, they are not necessarily building the right homes in the right places. We need more control locally and the people who are providing the houses need more input into how that is actually managed and developed.

To summarise, we have around four million households in this country that still live in social housing. We know that they are typically lower cost than private rented, that they are typically higher standard than private rented, and more secure than privately rented homes. Nevertheless, out of those four million, the latest statistics show that half a million of them fall short of those standards. Moreover, a quarter of a million are classified as unfit for human habitation. That is due to lack of investment.

It is just completely unacceptable that people have to accept low standards of housing. We owe it to all the children that we represent, you know the ones I represent in Workington constituency, there are 37% in Moss Bay, 31% in Ellenborough, and these are high numbers of children in my constituency who are living in poverty. In 2019 that is utterly unacceptable.

I think that WCCPF is doing a fantastic job here, and it is great to see you all taking part in this, because we all want to see our children have a good start in life and housing has to be a critical part of that. So good luck to you, whatever you are doing, you have my absolute support.

## Housing Association Perspectives

### ***Westfield Housing Association: Susan Duxbury***

Westfield have recently observed that many families approach them for help, both new and existing tenants and families. Follow-up visits show that some families have very little by way of basic goods like beds, cookers, carpets or any financial means or supportive family to help them get these. Westfield, a relatively small organisation in comparison with some of the other housing associations, have only got 600 houses on stock so they work with other organisations like Impact Furniture Services. In response to the increasing needs of families, the trustee board at Westfield has recently agreed to set aside a £10,000 fund to allow them to help families meet their basic needs. Westfield have also been working with UCLan on a Connected Communities research project and recruiting residents to be community researchers to establish the needs of the community as seen through the eyes of the community.

### ***Home Group: Lisa Russell***

Home Group works nationally in partnership with Citizens Advice and other financial advice and inclusion services to help customers make the best of what income they have. In Cumbria they offer an apprenticeship scheme targeted at existing customers aged sixteen plus, and the current two apprentices are doing some fantastic and invaluable work in the areas where they live. They go on as part of their apprenticeship, to get qualifications and hopefully that puts them in a better position moving forward, in terms of their life chances.

Regeneration is particularly relevant to West Cumbria and Home Group are currently investing in three main areas. The age of the stock and a historical lack of investment needs to be addressed. Of the 10,000 Home Group homes in Cumbria, 75% are three bedroomed houses, a profile that no longer meet the needs of the population. Much of Home Group's planning is focused around changing that profile of their stock to meet the

real need, meaning this will change the profile of the stock to bungalows, flats, community wellbeing schemes, two of which will be in West Cumbria.

As a result of the change in their rent arrangements, Home Group have withdrawn from offering value added as a landlord. However, the new rent arrangements will mean that they do have some more flexibility and have committed to provide more colleagues to engage closely with their neighbourhoods. Over the next two years Home Group will build approximately 2,000 homes in Cumbria. Home Group see it is critical that they are providing a new supply of good quality homes that are not only fit for purpose now, but are also future proofed, so they can be adapted as customers change, or things in their life change.

Home Group want the involvement of the communities they serve and are moving away from being transactional to adopting a proactive approach with added value. As part of this, Home Group are recruiting some more housing managers who will work in their neighbourhoods and they will be accountable and responsible for these particular grouping of homes and customers. Part of their role is going to be making sure that Home Group meet their customers' need wherever possible, and when this isn't possible, to signpost to relevant services.

In the last year Home Group have invested £7million in Cumbrian properties, recognising the need to offer quality homes to for the customers and the children in those households. There has been a lot of investment, but with 10,000 homes of the age that they are, obviously it is not all going to happen quickly. The future direction is positive; community patches, apprenticeships, the regeneration and the new build that Home Group will be doing should really make a difference to the life changes and wellbeing of children, directly and indirectly.

### ***Impact Housing: Andrea Thorn***

It's great to see the government now recognising the important role that social housing plays and taking the necessary steps to safeguard the sector and our customers moving forward. We're in the last year of the rent reductions this year, which means from next year there will be a new rent standard and the Government's offer to increase rent by CPI+1% which will give social landlords increased capacity to be able to offer added value activities that help to sustain tenancies and create great communities.

At Impact Housing, we have continued to fund added value services throughout this challenging period of austerity, although not to the extent that we did in the past; but we have always recognised the importance of a wraparound service for our customers. It is not just providing them with a home, it's about providing them the necessary advice and support to sustain their tenancy.

Our new Corporate Strategy 2019-22, includes 4 key strands of activities; the first is centred on Poverty Reduction. We recognise that many of our customers are living in poverty and it is not just the traditional unemployed poverty anymore, we have many customers in low paid employment resulting in 'in-work' poverty becoming a real issue for our customers too. We offer customers a 'Money Matters' service which provides additional support and help with Universal Credit claims, helping with benefit entitlement, making sure they maximise their income and helping them understand where they can go for additional support by signposting them to services such as budgeting and debt management advice.

We have the Impact Furniture Service, which is not only providing people with low cost opportunities to get furniture to set up their home to begin with so they don't get into debt, but it's also helping with environmental initiatives around reducing landfill as well as offering volunteering opportunities to our customers and the wider community to assist them in gaining work experience and building a CV. The Impact Furniture Service is available to anyone and it would be helpful if other social landlords and agencies supported this initiative, particularly with empty property clearances so we can recycle any leftover furniture, re-vamp it and give it a new lease of life that will benefit other customers in the local community.

Our second strategic objective is Raising Aspirations because we also know that in West Cumbria we have third and sometimes fourth generation unemployed with low aspirations. The affordability and average earnings have been skewed in West Cumbria due to high earnings at Sellafield and this has created a huge financial divide in some communities. We are working with local schools to support initiatives such as offering interview techniques and skills to Year 11s. We have a huge bank of volunteers that come in and work with us and that's helping people build a CV, supporting them to develop a work ethic and providing basic skills and experience to give them examples they can use in an interview. So far this year we have worked with around 30 volunteers

and have helped move three of them into permanent employment.

The third strategic objective is Great Homes and we are investing £25m over the next three years into property improvements and that's, thankfully, as a result of our partnership with The Riverside Group which has enabled us to access the funding and deliver the much needed investment in our properties.

Having a full understanding of our property assets and stock condition is key as well as understanding the future demand for additional homes. However, the challenge in West Cumbria is not one centred on an undersupply of social housing, it's one centred around low demand as there are areas where properties are standing empty that nobody wants to live in, particularly in villages on the outskirts of urban centres, because they lack support services and amenities and there are no transport links to enable people to access services as well as employment opportunities. As much as we may want to investment in new developments, what we actually need in West Cumbria is government investment in the regeneration of those low demand areas, however, the priority for public funding at the moment is centred on achieving the government's goal of building 300,000 new homes each year.

Our final objective is Transforming Services which aims to achieve an improved balance between transactional and relational services to customers. We are developing our digital service offer to customers to enable an easy option to undertake routine activities such as reporting repairs and paying rent, which will free up our staff resources to focus on the relational activities with customers, offering a face to face service to those customers who need it. To support this way of working, we are launching our new Customer App in the Autumn which will hopefully lead to an improved balance in service delivery for our customers.

## Children's Services Perspectives

### **Andrea Hardie-Knight and Brenda Holden: Howgill Family Centre**

Howgill Family Centre employs around seventy staff and operates throughout Copeland. It offers a range of services, including early help, family support (which includes supporting families with housing issues such as overcrowding, home conditions), along with therapeutic interventions such as learn to relax, play therapy and baby groups. Howgill also have four nurseries and a charity shop providing excellent quality children's clothes at a reduced price. Howgill receives about thirty referrals a week and in 2018 worked with approximately 4,500 people.



Howgill have identified a number of challenges facing families in hardship in relation to housing:

- **Destitution:** Many families who approach Howgill for help are in urgent need of housing. They lack basic household items or the financial means to purchase them. This may be for a number of reasons, which include debt, fleeing domestic violence and teen pregnancy.
- **A Transactional Approach:** Howgill have received reports that families sometimes struggle to engage with housing associations due to the revised communication procedures, which are predominately done over the phone or the internet, rather than through meeting face to face with a housing officer.
- **Intergenerational Poverty:** Howgill work with families who have experienced poverty for up to five generations. The disadvantage faced by these families is deep, and families feel stuck in a cycle.
- **Fleeing Domestic Violence:** Individuals fleeing domestic violence are at particular risk of homelessness and destitution. When someone (male or female) leaves a violent household they often leave with no possessions. These vulnerable families often fall into arrears quickly and consequently return to the perpetrator.
- **Overcrowding:** The current housing stock is not always suitable for families, or families are not always prepared to relocate to accommodation to suit their needs. This can mean that children do not have adequate space to develop as they should.

*“Together, we can all do our little bit to help families, especially those presenting with crisis situations”  
(Delegate)*

### *Working Together*

Housing associations have a key role in accessing and working with families. For example, maintenance workers access properties to conduct annual electrical tests and gas certification. These maintenance workers may be the only external agencies accessing properties and are thus in a unique and valuable position to recognise that families may be in need or that a child is at risk. This may have historically been done by health visitors, but austerity has seen the number of health visits reduced. Howgill encourage all housing associations to refer families to their services. Working together all agencies can better piece together information about a family's circumstances and thus better understand and respond to the challenges they are facing.

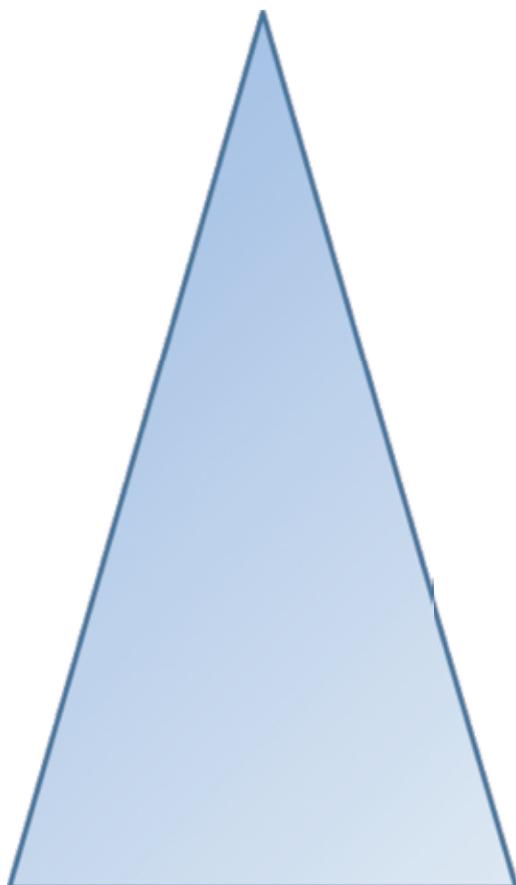
### *Carol Eland: Barnardo's Allerdale*

Barnardo's in the Allerdale area have nine Children's Centres, based in Wigton, Silloth, Aspatria, Flimby, Maryport, Distington, Cockermouth, Keswick and Workington. Services offered by Barnardo's include targeted support, early help and outreach services. They offer support for children in care, those affected by parental imprisonment and those who have experienced Child Sexual Exploitation. Barnardo's also offer breakfast clubs, health screening and parental projects.



## Housing and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Barnardo's propose to work with families to meet all their basic needs, as identified by Abraham Maslow. Within his Hierarchy of Needs, Maslow suggested that people are motivated to change to achieve certain needs and that they are motivated to fulfil the more basic needs before moving onto other needs. These needs can be split into categories and work up from the broad base of physiological needs to the peak of self-actualisation.



**Self-Actualisation:** A home is where one can move towards becoming his or her best self. Having a creative space to learn and develop supports children to thrive.

**Esteem:** Esteem needs are the basis for the human desire and includes feeling accepted and valued by others. A house that is clean and organised can be a nicer environment than a dirty house in disrepair.

**Love & Belonging:** Individuals may spend hours in their home with others that share the same living environment. A home can help shape relationships and aid in building bonds between family members. When household members work together to take pride in their environment they learn to work as a team.

**Safety & Security:** Housing may provide a sense of safety from the outside world. It should be a place of comfort and contentment and provide a sense of safety within a community.

**Physiological Needs:** The need for shelter should be met through adequate housing, which also acts as a place for the storage, preparation and eating space for food, along with providing a place to sleep.

Barnardo's encounters families who face challenges in some or all of these needs in relation to housing, supporting families (often through working with partner organisations) to meet these needs.

***"Building positive relationships is key to supporting and moving these families through to where they need to be to do their best" (Delegate)***

### **Working Together**

Barnardo's propose that social housing associations be invited to early help meetings, providing all agencies with the opportunity to engage with families and build relationships

### **Lesley Sanczuk and Janice Ogilvie: Pause Programme, Children's Services**

One in three children in West Cumbria live in poverty. There are an additional 200,000 children in poverty in Cumbria than there were five years ago. Potential consequences of children living in poverty are violence, substance misuse, mental health and ill health, and all of those issues touch individual families. West Cumbria has the highest number of children subject to child protection plans in the county, so children in West Cumbria are suffering greater degrees of abuse than other children in our statistical neighbours. Furthermore, over 300 children in West Cumbria are in the care system, and again this is above regional figures.

After examining local data, it was revealed that approximately seventy-five women have had 250 children removed from their care. Cumbria County Council works in partnership with a national initiative called Pause, which works assertively with women to prevent further removal occurring. It does this by asking women to take a pause from having children by using the long-acting reversible contraception, whilst they receive support to help them get them gain stability in their lives.

In Cumbria, the Pause programme has currently worked with twenty-one women who have had seventy-eight children removed. They have multiple needs, including debt, homelessness, and drug and alcohol dependency. Many possess no formal identifications and hold no bank accounts, which impacts on their ability to claim benefits. Some women grew up in care and lacked trust in professionals. Some women have been involved

in criminality which impacts on their ability to access social housing.



When women have their children removed many supportive services are inaccessible, for example Howgill and Barnardo's. This leaves women, who most probably will be traumatised by having their children removed, left with little or no support. Pause is an intense eighteen-month programme, where Pause practitioners work with women to identify their priorities and work towards these. The top priority is always maintaining a relationship with their children, followed by housing. This is usually followed by financial support, emotional resilience, and education and employment. The Pause programme has been successful in helping women to gain employment and volunteering opportunities,

along with linking up with health services such as GPs, opticians, dentist, and in some cases, Unity drug and alcohol service. It is estimated that the cohort of women involved in the Pause programme would have had six children during that eighteen months period, and all of those six children would have come into the care system because the women had not made the changes at that point in time. This clearly demonstrates the impact the programme in lessening the pressure on children's services.

The anonymised case studies presented below hope to provide the perspective from some of the women who have benefitted from the Pause programme.

### ***Case study one***

Miranda fled domestic violence from three different partners and was in £1,700 rent arrears, which stopped her being able to bid for social housing. She was advised by the police to move out of her home for her own safety and was provided with a property by the local housing association which had no furnishings or fittings. Pause practitioners worked with partner agencies to provide essentials such as a bed and curtains.

### ***Case study two***

Stacey was in an abusive relationship, a drug user, under probation, and had £1,000 rent arrears. She had totally disengaged from supportive services, despite being desperate to leave her relationship. Pause practitioners supported Stacey to get alternative accommodation away from her partner and begin to access services that could offer support.

### ***Case study three***

Lucy was provided with a flat by the local housing association after being made homeless through leaving her violent partner. However, the flat was situated opposite former partner's residence. Pause practitioners supported Lucy to put safety measures in place with the police to try to ensure her safety.

## The Enabling and Facilitating Role of Local Authorities

### **Amanda Starr: Copeland Borough Council**

When people are in crisis, are homeless or live in an unfit property, local councils can support through statutory services but there is much more they can do to support their residents. The enabling and facilitating role of the local authority is really important in this, and it is a discretionary activity that local authorities will, to greater or lesser extent, get involved in. Copeland Borough Council (CBC) propose that local authorities can influence this agenda in two key ways:

#### **Enablement**

CBC provides funding to focus on homeless prevention and relieving homelessness. If a housing association is taking action that would result in somebody being evicted, we can support tenants through that process. If there are rent arrears we can look at making some gap payments through the discretionary housing payment fund or the homelessness prevention fund. The homelessness prevention fund can support tenants with a range of costs such as deposits, furnishings, carpets, removal costs and storage costs. We also work closely with our registered provider partners and will on occasion contribute to arrears if this will allow the resident to transfer to a more suitable property.



#### **Facilitation**

The facilitating role includes working with local partners in a number of ways, such as working with local industry to draw money down to invest in services and also working with statutory, voluntary and third sector partners. Examples of how this facilitation role works in practice can be seen below:

- The Financial Inclusion project is a project delivered in partnership with Citizens Advice, Credit Union and Howgill Family Centre. CBC, through their facilitation role, helped to access money from the Sellafield Social Impact Team and the Copeland Community Fund to enable a district wide roll-out of the project. This facilitative role included bringing agencies together and generating a grant agreement with the fund-receiving third sector bodies. The Council receives reports detailing the work being undertaken with the project and the number of referrals made to local agencies
- The Domestic Abuse Project (DAP) is a project delivered in partnership with the other Cumbrian Local Authorities following a successful joint funding bid to MHCLG. CBC employs an officer working predominantly with people that are homeless or are risk of becoming homeless due to domestic abuse. All councils have a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation in these situations because it is unsafe to return. CBC acknowledges that this comes with multiple issues that must be dealt with to fully support these residents, and this is provided through the discretionary work within the Domestic Abuse Project. The meaningful changes that occur in these peoples' lives are delivered through networking and signposting to other agencies as well as the work of our officer. Since the launch of the domestic abuse project in 2017 over seventy individuals and families have been helped, and nearly 100 children have been lifted out of abusive households.

The Housing Options Team at CBC is customer focused with a strong ethos that enabling and facilitating can provide better ways of working for families in poverty, which includes strong partnership working and shared responsibility.

Note: Many of these services are mirrored in work delivered by Allerdale Borough Council. Local authorities are members of the Cumbria Housing and Wellbeing Group which aims to drive forward a countywide strategic approach and gives opportunity for initiatives such as this to be promoted to other partners across Cumbria.

## James Young: Copeland Borough Council

The Children's Charter was borne out of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Copeland Borough Council, after reading the 'Being A Child in Cumbria' report from Barnardo's. The committee wanted to make an impact on child poverty, whilst realising the limitations in what they could achieve. Through consultation with local partners, such as Howgill Family Centre, and working collaboratively with UCLan, the idea of a Children's Charter was agreed to be a realistic and impactful way of challenging child poverty in Copeland. The Children's Charter has now been accepted by the Executive and has been officially launched. The launch included a press release because the council found the wider population are not aware of the prevalence of child poverty in Copeland.



The infographic features a light green background with a central illustration of three children playing with a red flag on a pole. The text is organized into five pillars, each with a list of commitments. The Copeland Borough Council logo is in the top right corner.

# Children's Charter

**Copeland**  
borough council  
*Proud of our past. Energised for our future.*

- Hearing your voice**
  - We understand the valuable contribution children can make to our community.
  - We are dedicated to putting children's best interests at the forefront of what we do.
  - We will listen and honestly answer any questions you have.
- Working with schools**
  - We will work with school councils to ensure all children are represented in policies that will affect them.
- Staying safe**
  - We will work with other organisations to ensure that you feel safe in your community.
  - We will work effectively on your behalf and do everything we can to make you feel safe and protected when you use our service.
- Changing people's attitudes**
  - We recognise that children are the future of Copeland.
  - We will challenge negative attitudes towards children facing the most barriers in life and look for ways our services can help.
- Promoting health and wellbeing**
  - We will ensure that children have a safe and clean environment to thrive in.
  - We will use our services and Copeland Health and Wellbeing Forum to create projects in your community to ensure you grow up healthy, happy and all you can be.

The Charter itself will remain the same and will sit under Copeland Borough Council's Social Inclusion programme. The actions that are adopted under each of the pillars will change as they are completed, incorporating the council and the local authority, and then rolled out.

Within the first year of the charter the council will focus on their own way of working. For example, the overview and scrutiny panel will hold annual meetings with local school councils, when they can send pupil representatives, to tell the council the problems perceived in their community. The council will listen to these views and respond appropriately. This is hoped to not only improve understanding of issues affecting local communities, but also empower children and young people in having their voices heard. This form of democratic engagement has already taken place in the development of Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs). Local children have worked with UCLan in taking hundreds of photos evidencing issues that impact on them, and subsequently PSPOs have been developed by solicitors and are now enforced. This shows local children that they can have real agency in their community.

An annual report will be presented to council every year and a child poverty champion will be elected from the council to represent members and feedback to the council when appropriate, working closely with the social inclusion team. A Children's Charter panel will sit in the overview and scrutiny committee function, which will consist of elected members meeting regularly and working in partnership with local partners to better understand the situation of child poverty in Copeland.

Copeland Borough Council seeks to build relations between housing associations and Members, which have become strained in the past. The council seek to make Members aware of the positive and preventative work being done by housing associations, not just aware of the complaints they receive for their constituents.

## Towards a Rational Approach: The Preston Model

**Julian Manley: Social Innovation Manager, Centre for SME Development Social Innovation, University of Central Lancashire and Chair, Preston Cooperative Development Network**

The context of Preston and the reason for the Preston model arising and being developed today, comes out of crisis. This crisis occurred in 2011, when an inward investment renovation project in Preston called the Tithebarn project collapsed completely as a result of the financial crisis. A standard economic response to this would have been to try to secure some inward investment using the same approach. Preston City Council took an alternative approach, where the Councillors and key stakeholders in Preston reflected on the wealth and resources already existing in Preston. Consequently, UCLan were approached to conduct some scoping research into the possibility for cooperative work in Preston. The vision was to promote a relational way of working, through cooperatives, the sharing of ideas, assets and resources.

The result of the research was a report and a series of recommendations presented to Preston City Council for developing a cooperative culture in Preston. One of those recommendations was to create the Preston Cooperative Development Network (PCDN), of which Julian is Chair, and the PCDN has been working since 2017 to provide opportunities for the development of cooperation and culture change in Preston, which includes the development of worker-owned cooperative businesses.

The research found that many agencies and third sector organisations in Preston were already working to cooperative principles but they were not formally constituted as cooperatives. In other words, there is a potential in Preston for thinking more proactively and more structurally and systemically with cooperative principles and values. In response Preston City Council created a webpage dedicated to community wealth building, which includes the PCDN.

Another aspect of the Preston model has been the insistence that anchor institutions should be able to increase local procurement. Those institutions are, for example, the local authorities, UCLan, the police and the hospital. These institutions have large expenditures and Preston City Council has worked with the procurement officers in the anchor institutions, including UCLan, to persuade them that this was both possible and desirable. They appealed to the role of anchor institutions in the local area and found that many procurement officers live in the Preston area. Many officers felt a sense of pride and interest in the idea that quality jobs with a living wage can be produced in Preston as a result of procurement policies. Education was key, the procurement officers needed to be made aware of how this new method of procurement would work. This was based on the premise of changing a culture and changing a way of being.

This idea works; out of the total spend of all the anchor institutions in 2013, only 5% was spent in Preston. By 2017 this was 18.2%, resulting in £75 million being repatriated into Preston and also providing new jobs. The Lancashire statistics are even more impressive. In 2013, 39% of the total spend of all the anchor institutions was in Lancashire. In 2017 this rose to nearly 80% which equates to nearly £200 million. This result has come out of almost zero investment.

In order to make the Preston Model transferable, the Labour Party created a Community Wealth Building Unit, with a range of stakeholders developing the ideas from the Preston Model and applying them to future Labour Party policy and to local Labour controlled authorities around the UK. This appeals to councils as all have significant financial pressures, and the Preston Model offers a way to build community wealth with minimum expenditures.

The University has developed a business hub, called Propeller and the Centre for SME Development to network SMEs and to present the possibility of developing business plans to graduates and staff who want to have opportunities to create cooperatives, as well as traditional small start-up companies. This is viewed a virtuous cycle, where graduates remain in Preston, building intellectual wealth, which of course eventually is translated into financial wealth. The Council is supporting this project in any way it can, sometimes by considering offering newly formed worker owned cooperatives properties at a peppercorn rent.

Community Gateway Housing Association is another anchor institution. They have increased their local procurement and are further increasing their way of working cooperatively, which has always been part of the Gateway ethos. For example, tenants are on the governing board, meaning that tenants make high level

decisions about how the place is governed. In another example, a cooperative called Our Food Co-op, was created to encourage healthy eating. This was supported by Community Gateway Housing Association with a van, which delivered healthy, fresh local produce to tenants.

The Preston model is based on building up wealth and building up quality jobs, with very little financial investment. This came about through following cooperative values and principles:

1. Open and Voluntary Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Members' Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training, and Information
6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives
7. Concern for Community

For more information about Preston Model, see:

<https://www.preston.gov.uk/thecouncil/the-preston-model/what-is-the-preston-model/>

and

<https://theconversation.com/preston-changed-its-fortunes-with-corbymomics-now-other-cities-are-doing-the-same-106293>



## Facilitated conversation

### ***The Value of Co-Operative Working***

Cooperative approaches offer those working with families experiencing poverty a useful framework for collaboration. Identifying large anchor institutions, such as educational institutions can help to bring organisations together to share expertise and resources.

***“You have to get the accountants and the economists to understand, actually this makes financial and economic sense as well as social and educational sense” (Delegate)***

Adopting cooperative values and principles within a social housing and child poverty context can be seen as offering three particular benefits:

1. **Funding:** Different organisations have knowledge of, and access to, different funding streams. Cooperating through the sharing of this information and the economic resources generated through funding, offers a stronger, more sustainable framework to meet the needs of the people in vulnerable communities.
2. **Communication and referrals:** Sharing expertise can help inform practice of all agencies, through education and training incentives. Furthermore, sharing information about families through an established referral method and multiagency meetings can ensure that agencies are informed about how to best understand and support families experiencing poverty and housing problems.
3. **Intensive support for vulnerable families:** Through the cooperative approach taken to communication and referrals, a system of multi-agency intense support can be offered to families in social housing with the most needs.

### ***Financial Education***

When families seek social housing, they are often in need furniture and household items, which social housing providers cannot supply. Consequently, some families seek private tenancies which impacts on the demand for social housing. The need for furniture leads many families to purchase items through companies with large interest rates, which further exacerbates the financial challenges facing these families.

***“When families get a property, they do not have what they need, so they head straight to Bright House, and they are paying an extortionate amount of money. Whereas if there was the education and the support at this stage, they could get twice as much and manageable within their budget. It is that holistic package at that point of getting that house” (Delegate)***

A multi-agency approach which connects families with supportive services such as the local Credit Unions and Impact Furniture Service can offer an alternative avenue that would support families to become more financially stable.

### ***Political Context***

The role of national policies, subject to national government priorities, can impact on how local housing stock is developed.

***“There’s a reluctance within the registered sector to start doing loads of work to create one bed flats or two bed houses because the next government may decide to scrap that overnight... because they don’t know whether that’s going to still be the same in two years’ time” (Delegate)***

Housing associations and third sector organisations can work with elected members to campaign for the government to review policies, procedures and legislation recognising the different compositions of different families, for example, when parents have dual custody of a child.

***“Just because somebody holds the Child Benefit book does not mean they are more important than in that child’s life than somebody else” (Delegate)***

***“The courts have recognised the importance for the children of having both parents there, but housing legislation has not caught up with it” (Delegate)***

## Outcomes

The purpose of the seminar was to facilitate co-operative conversations between housing associations, local authorities and children's services. A number of key outcomes emerged from honest, respectful discussions, with all partners present pledging to take the following actions:

1. **Child Poverty at the Forefront of Policy:** Housing associations are encouraged to adopt their own children's charter, or to work with local authorities to use theirs. Local authorities responsible for challenging child poverty, such as the Children's Trust Board, will acknowledge the importance of working with housing authorities in future plans.
2. **An Institutional Promise to Support Families Facing Hardship:** Delegates pledged to share learning from the seminar to all in their organisations. They will encourage staff, from the strategic board level, to the operational level, to be cognisant to how they can best support families facing hardship.
3. **Include Housing in Multi-Agency Meetings:** Third sector children's services have pledged to share relevant referral forms (including early help) and invite housing associations to multi-agency meetings. Housing associations have pledged to attend and fully engage with these meetings.
4. **Continue to work with WCCPF:** All parties have pledged to nominate a child poverty champion to receive monthly updates on the latest news in child poverty, acknowledging that WCCPF can provide impartial local expertise. WCCPF have pledged to continue to work with all parties and to facilitate future meetings to reflect and review working practices.

More long term and ambitious outcomes were also discussed, including better multi agency working with housing associations to develop better working partnerships and relationships with third sector organisations. Inspired by Copeland Borough Council's Children's Charter and its accompanying panel, it was suggested that specialist panels could be facilitated by local authorities. The need for lobbying on a local and national level was also acknowledged, with all services around the table still suffering the effects of austerity.

## Conclusion

The accounts from children's services and organisations highlight the lived experiences of families in poverty, illustrating the challenges associated with social housing. Social housing associations have provided valuable insight into the frameworks under which they operate, and local associations have described the facilitating and enabling role they can have within homeless prevention and long-term tenancy sustainability.

Agencies can use this report as a catalyst for wraparound services for families in crisis, in encouraging services to work collaboratively to create a holistic package of interventions.

To ensure the county's most vulnerable children grow up in homes that encourages them to thrive, all agencies must fulfil their responsibility to protect the welfare of children and families.

Transactional processes and frameworks imposed by corporate bodies based on service delivery do not take account the needs of individuals and how they live their lives. Building relationally focused services and adopting a person-centred approach will lead to the needs of all families being met whilst also ensuring organisations are fulfilling their own objectives.

Over the next 5 years we would envisage that levels of organisational collaboration develop to the point where child poverty in West Cumbria is further alleviated. WCCPF urges you to play your part.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: List of Attendees

### Housing Associations

- Home Group: Lisa Russell
- Impact: Andrea Thorn
- Impact/ Riverside: Chris Billinge
- Westfield: Susan Duxbury
- Castles and Coasts: Ellen Graham

### Local Authorities

- Allerdale Borough Council: Vivien Steadman
- Copeland Borough Council: Amanda Starr, Julie Friend, James Young
- Eden Borough Council: Louise Jeffery
- Cumbria County Council: Joel Rasbash

### Children's Services

- Howgill Family Centre: Andrea Hardie-Knight, Brenda Holden
- Barnardo's Allerdale: Carol Eland
- Children's Services: Lesley Sanczuk, Janice Ogilvie

### UCLan

- Professor Aiden Worsley
- Dr Julian Manley
- Suzanne Wilson

### Other attendees:

- Sue Hayman MP
- Willie Slavin (WCCPF)
- Michael Heaslip (Samuel Lindow Foundation)

For more information about this report or WCCPF contact Suzanne Wilson on:  
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## Appendix B: Event Feedback

### What learning did you take from the event?

- What each of the different housing associations and other types of organisations are currently doing, and the challenges they face to support families in poverty.
- That there is a willingness for the parties around the table to work together better where appropriate to improve the housing situation for children.
- The role of Social Landlords and their perspectives of elected members.
- That there is a great sense of willingness from all agencies to play their part and some just need guidance on what they can do on the ground.

### What have you done differently to challenge child poverty since attending the event?

- More an action taken really – we've agreed to put some funding towards Well Whitehaven project which focuses on enhancing employability skills, Improving health and wellbeing, encouraging social interaction/ addressing loneliness and celebrating community. All of which will support improving child poverty.
- Progress is continuing to be made with the Copeland Borough Council Children's Charter. From the meeting I will be engaging with more partners during the charter's continued development.
- Discussed child poverty with other forums to raise awareness.

### What do you plan to do differently relating to challenging child poverty?

- We'll be doing a social value survey as part of a wider aspirations piece.
- Engage with Sellafield, and more specifically, Jamie Reed.
- Ensure RPs are properly engaged in case conference work.

### How did you find the format event?

- Worked well as informal, round table discussion.
- I thought it was a good balance of presentations and discussion and all parties felt able to be open and honest.
- Well balanced for informal discussion.
- Great balance of speakers and conversation.

### What other topics surrounding child poverty would you like to learn about?

- Interested to learn about all related topics so that I can map the links to our activity in communities.
- Inter-generational poverty.
- Role of Children's Services.

