

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 23 JULY 2020

Question to Leader of the Council

By Kyle Robinson

Question

4.2 million children were living in poverty in the UK in 2018/19 and the Government's Social Mobility Commission recently highlighted the shocking fact that there has been an increase of 600,000 more children living in relative poverty since 2012. In light of this appalling situation will the Leader of the Council now commit to reversing his administration's decision to cut and close Staffordshire County Council's Local Welfare Assistance Fund?

Reply

Within Staffordshire we have been working for some time with the MHCLG on the Building Resilient Families and Communities programme. This programme is focussed on a range of outcomes one of which is financial exclusion. As such we have a range of support that is available to families in Staffordshire including;

- Access to employment advisors who can support families to maximise their income and support them to access volunteering, training or alternative employment. These employment advisors have mapped out a range of support to assist families which includes the community support groups, access to funding, emergency equipment all of which is accessible and available for families in need.
- The borough and district councils offer support to families facing financial hardship with rent and council tax.
- We fund a range of organisations to support families to manage their finances including Money Smart in Newcastle-under-Lyme which run through aspire for all Newcastle's families. This service supports with budgeting, reducing bills, maximising income, accessing emergency funds and savings. We hope that this service helps families develop the skills needed to support their ongoing financial security.

During COVID-19 we have been working hard to ensure that families in need are supported and the potential risks are identified. This has included the delivery of a targeted access to a virtual family hub and survival kit which have been delivered to over 3000 children. These survival kits have shared details of the family hubs and connected people to community support. In addition the government have announced additional funding for food and emergency supplies and this will be available to support families over the next 12 months.

The Early Help partnership have agreed that Financial Exclusion is a common theme which may require a countywide focus and funding from the 20 / 21 Earned Autonomy budget. A multi-agency partnership Task Group has been established to map existing provision, identify gaps and demand and scope the potential to commission a service across the county using Earned Autonomy funding.