SOCIAL SECURITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

25 APRIL 2022

Informal meeting with the Shetland Anchor Project

Committee Members in attendance: Elena Whitham, Jeremy Balfour, Foysol Choudhury, Pam Duncan-Glancy and Emma Roddick.
The meeting took place on Microsoft Teams.

Presenters from the Anchor Project: Emma Perring, Sandra Summers and Lynsey Hall.

Committee members met with the Anchor Project to hear about the work that is being done in Shetland to empower and support families to tackle problems before they develop into crisis. The following points were raised during discussion:

- The Aim of the project is to facilitate learning and action that demonstrates the value of family-led problem solving and early intervention. Within that aim there is a belief that empowerment of families leads to positive change and that this project is a practical test of this positive change
- The Anchor Project is one of eight Early Action System Change Projects which are funded through the Communities Fund (which was the Big Lottery)
- The Project is funded for nearly 5 years. It is part of a one-off funding stream which began in 2017
- They had 6-9 months at the outset of the project to develop their plan for delivery before having to begin that delivery. This planning time was important
- The Project Board includes representatives from Police Scotland, Shetland Islands Council, the NHS and the Third Sector. They believe that this collaboration and buy-in has been crucial to success

Anchor's Objectives

To facilitate family-led problem-solving through direct support to families;

To record and share learning on barriers and opportunities to family-led problem solving and the value of early intervention; and

To demonstrate the potential value of system change, and facilitate system change through stimulating either small incremental changes or step-changes in service delivery in existing services.

Target group for Anchor →

Families in regular contact with statutory services

Families struggling to cope or on a difficult pathway

Families coping with life's challenges

- Key issues include determining what the barriers are for families accessing support and how systems can remove those barriers

- It is a time limited project with the aim to support 30-40 families for the duration of the project
- It was designed to work with families who are not keeping their head above water but who don't require the support of statutory services
- Some people don't have friends or families to support them through difficult times. This offers that support for people who are feeling overwhelmed
- The project supports the goal of reducing child poverty, particularly in rural areas (as acknowledged in the Scottish Government's Best Start, Bright Futures: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022 to 2026

Rationale for the Project
- Too many of Shetland's residents are experiencing complex crisis before they receive support
- Early action can help to avoid crisis, limit the negative impacts on the individual/ family, improve the outcomes for the individual/ family, and reduce the level of service intervention
- The rationale for the project is based on: 2005/2006 research into Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Shetland; the experience of families in the context of a Child's Plan and Adult Self-Assessment tools; as well as the national understanding of the Christie Commission recommendations
- Whilst the idea of avoiding crisis, improving individual outcomes and reducing public sector resource is well-rehearsed, it has proven difficult to achieve
- These principles are being realised through the Anchor Project
- It is important to look at the family as a whole rather than as separate plans for children and adults

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Delivery

2017: Secured Resources

2018: Project Set-Up

2019: Project Delivery, through one Primary School

      Began design of family-support

2020: Diverted resources to support all schools pandemic response

2021: Scaled-up delivery, across three School Clusters + embedding approach in 4th area

      Defined family-support, focus on normalising access to it

2022: Recommendations for systems change and embedding model

- Financing for the project was used to pay for officers' time, seek external support for evaluation, build relationships between senior managers in different organisations and agile training for board members
- This relationship-building was crucial to buy-in by different bodies and allows conversations around resource allocation to happen. It also helped the pandemic response as these relationships were already in place.
- Turnover of staff is limited in Shetland which helps these relationships to be maintained and developed

- It started in Lerwick in one primary school. This was the starting point for developing the family support model which is now in place
- Through the first year of the pandemic, Sandra and Lynsey, the project officers, supported all head teachers to develop the capacity and confidence to identify families who would benefit from support (both practical support and signposting)
- Delivery has been scaled-up through money brought in from The Promise
- They are now working across three school clusters
- The model is being tested in different geographies
- They would like this type of family support to be normalised and embedded universally

Family-Led Approach

- *"I trust them to help me and they listened to me."*
- *"Just having someone listen to all of us and help us communicate."*
- *"Meeting up for a cuppa and a chat and getting clothes vouchers."*
- *"Having someone who doesn't judge you and being able to have a cup of coffee and just speak about anything."*
- *"Help when I needed it, just being there and even responding to my emails over the last year when I just wanted to run something past them."*
- *"Having someone to speak to that's like a friend."*

- It is key that this type of support is informal and led by each family – responding to their needs
- The Anchor Project needed to look at empowering families and working with them rather than things happening to them
- Families can come back at any stage regardless of time frame
- Evaluation, in order to understand the impact of this model on families and to see if they felt differently after receiving support, has been a key success factor.
- By asking families about their short, medium and long-term goals issues were uncovered which were not the original basis for support or discussion
- This is particularly useful in terms of financial issues as people are often reluctant to talk about them – however, they emerged through discussion and helping with other problems, which families felt more able to discuss
- This approach encourages practical problem solving by families
- Often people didn't know where to start with various problems that they were experiencing. Sometimes support involves actually attending meetings or appointment with different services rather than just referring through an email or signposting

- Despite not working directly with children in the first year, positive change was still recognisable in the children whose families were being supported by Anchor, evidenced by feedback from teachers
- The Project is filling the gap where issues are not serious enough to warrant statutory services
- The Project works with other local services to provide Money Worries training sessions for any professionals who are working in services which might encounter people with financial difficulties. These sessions explore how to broach conversations about money and encourage professionals to have these conversations with service-users

Impact: longer-term

- *"I would be worse off financially and more stressed out and have less positive time with my kids."*
- *"School exclusions would have continued and I wouldn't have handled it well. I can't do my work if my kids are home from school. It's an added pressure for me to get by but still be a Mum. My kids emotional health would have deteriorated further, the help they are getting now has made a difference."*
- *"Social work may have gotten involved. I would probably have gone to Women's Aid because of my relationship problems."*

- Families have been interviewed a year after support has ended, to see if they are still on a positive pathway; all continued to be making positive progress, without any support
- During interviews four respondents said that they are still experiencing the benefits of the work that they did with Anchor. This included: accessing opportunities including new employment and additional welfare benefits; enjoying improved relationships with family; and experiencing improved mental health. Three respondents began engaging with others more e.g. school and community. Three of the four respondents said improvements would not have happened without the work they did with Anchor. The fourth said that they are doing things they would have done anyway, but they are doing so with more knowledge and confidence
- Some returned to Anchor with new issues: this ability to be able to return for support at any point, is seen as crucial. Some people struggled during the pandemic and reengaged with the Project when support was needed. It is important that people gain confidence through the Project to problem solve and address problems, but also to always know that the door is still open
- What was not foreseen in the logic model is the importance of improving the supported individual's confidence as an outcome of the support provided. Almost all supported individuals highlighted how working with Anchor had given them greater confidence and a feeling of being more capable and in control. The evaluation of Anchor is beginning to highlight the importance of providing support which boosts an individual's confidence in order to achieve medium- and longer-term success. An individual's confidence to act may be

more central to understanding the difference between the outcomes achieved through early action and crisis intervention than simply the timing of the intervention
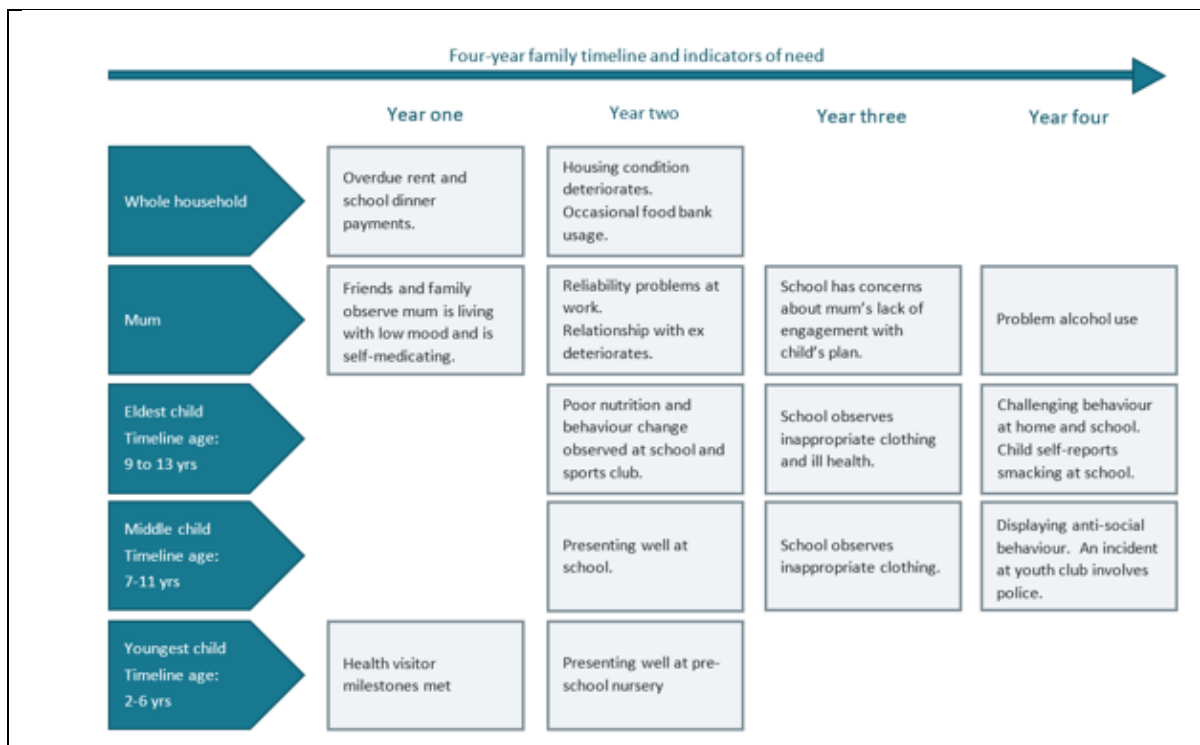
- Importance of taking opportunities to engage e.g. senior staff asking how someone is while they are collecting a food parcel from the school in the pandemic

Impact: legacy

- *"I feel better about myself and everything has slipped into place so I'm happier for my child which is good."*
- *"It was nice they got in touch with me a few times over the pandemic…. I didn't feel so alone"*
- *"I think I would still be working nights and would be seeing less of my child, I would be stressed about my finances and I wouldn't know where to start."*
- *"I don't know if we would have managed to all stay living together, the strain of our relationship was taking its toll on my mental health and I felt I got little help from my ex. I was happier once my child had a clear pathway for after leaving school, that was worrying me and think was part of the reason we were falling out."*
- *"I would be worse off financially and would probably be more depressed."*

Family-led activity

- In year 1, project officers spent an average of 11.2 hours per year with each family (from 5.5 to 22 hours) supporting 8 families
- In year 2 an average of 10.5 hours (from 2 to 21 hours) of direct or indirect support was spent with 12 families
- It is therefore anticipated that around 12 hours of support is needed per family over a 12-month period
- This is not much time to create a more positive trajectory for a family
- Most services are already available, so it is more about linking the family up with the relevant support they would benefit from. Families felt there were barriers to accessing these services without this support.
- Important to try to quantify the impact of this early prevention and resource implication.
- The family illustration provides an opportunity to estimate the potential direct and immediate service implications of crisis intervention, which provides a baseline against which the potential service resource implications of early action can be compared. The following describes a fictitious family, but it is based on case studies of families moving towards crisis. It shows the potential alternative outcomes for a Mum and her 3 children. The early indicator of difficulty was overdue rent and school dinner payments. This situation evolves over the next four years
- In the initial years, the indicators of need seen across different services were not being joined up

Four-year family timeline and indicators of need

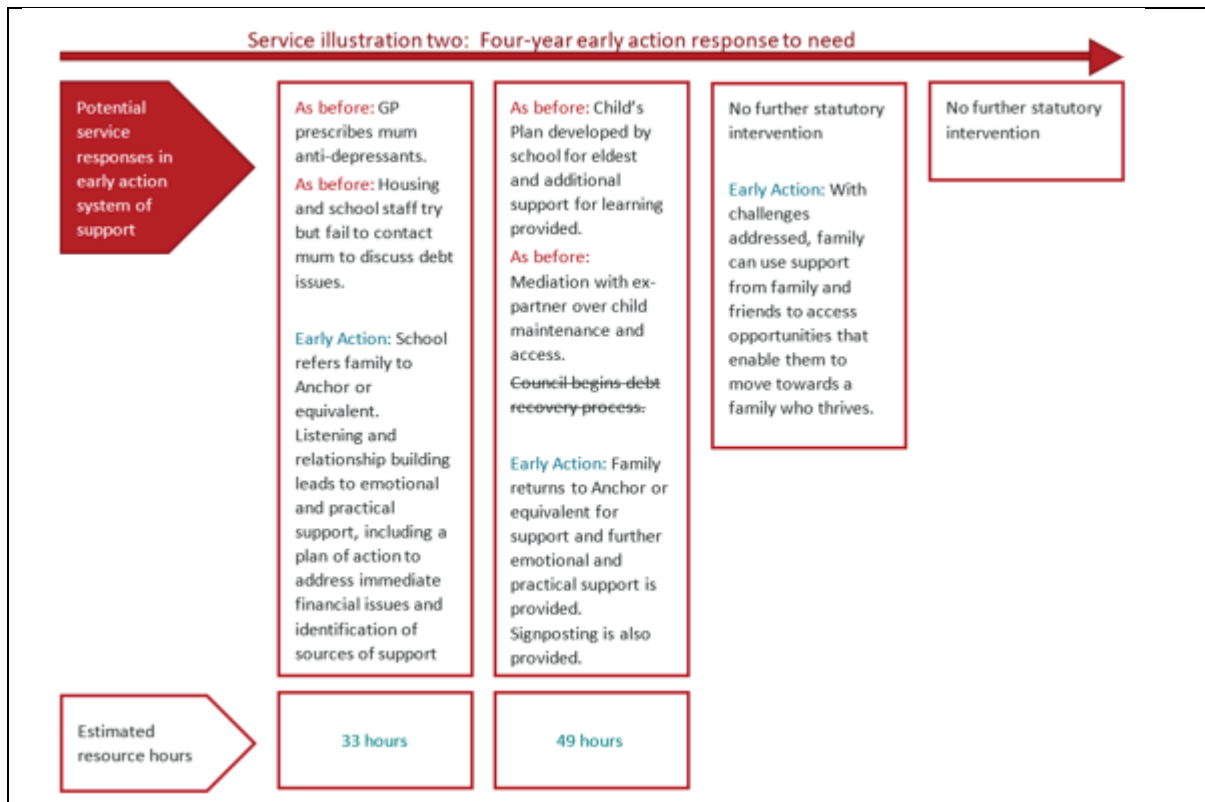|	Year one	Year two	Year three	Year four
Whole household	Overdue rent and school dinner payments.	Housing condition deteriorates. Occasional food bank usage.		
Mum	Friends and family observe mum is living with low mood and is self-medicating.	Reliability problems at work. Relationship with ex deteriorates.	School has concerns about mum's lack of engagement with child's plan.	Problem alcohol use
Eldest child Timeline age: 9 to 13 yrs		Poor nutrition and behaviour change observed at school and sports club.	School observes inappropriate clothing and ill health.	Challenging behaviour at home and school. Child self-reports smacking at school.
Middle child Timeline age: 7-11 yrs		Presenting well at school.	School observes inappropriate clothing.	Displaying anti-social behaviour. An incident at youth club involves police.
Youngest child Timeline age: 2-6 yrs	Health visitor milestones met	Presenting well at pre-school nursery		

- The following compares the resource implications of crisis support and an early action response
- There are several indicators that something isn't right and the first-year response determines the overall trajectory. In the crisis response services begin to join-up in year four at the point of crisis

Service illustration one: Four-year crisis support response to need

	Year one	Year two	Year three	Year four
Potential service responses in current system of support	GP prescribes mum anti-depressants. Housing and school staff try but fail to contact mum to discuss debt issues.	Child's Plan developed by school for eldest and additional support for learning provided. Mediation with ex-partner over child maintenance and access. Council begins debt recovery process.	Specialised services assess eldest child for ADHD. Voluntary referral to social work leads to family support worker but mum's engagement is inconsistent.	Child concern form on Middle Child sent to Social Work due to youth club incident. Child protection investigation (social work, police, health) into alleged smacking leads to case conference that looks at all 3 children. Voluntary Child Protection Plan agreed, and referral is made to Children's Reporter. Befriending supports Middle Child. Mum gets support to enable her to meet child needs.
Estimated resource hours	5 hours	40 hours	65 hours	184 hours

Those who informed the development of the illustration made the following observations:

- Often, but not always, by the time a situation has become a child protection issue there have been several indicators that something is not right in the household.

- The family circumstances described in the first year are not uncommon and any school could observe a family in this situation. The first year is a crunch time for mum and the wider family, a vital junction at which a direction of travel can be set for the wider family.
- Some indicators, such as problems at work, might not be visible to support services.
- The family would be landing on a lot of people's desks, but a joined-up approach does not occur until year four, when the situation has deteriorated, and at that point services work together to respond to urgent needs.

Service illustration two: Four-year early action response to need

Potential service responses in early action system of support

As before: GP prescribes mum anti-depressants. **As before:** Housing and school staff try but fail to contact mum to discuss debt issues.	**As before:** Child's Plan developed by school for eldest and additional support for learning provided. **As before:** Mediation with ex-partner over child maintenance and access.	No further statutory intervention	No further statutory intervention
Early Action: School refers family to Anchor or equivalent. Listening and relationship building leads to emotional and practical support, including a plan of action to address immediate financial issues and identification of sources of support	~~Council begins debt recovery process.~~ **Early Action:** Family returns to Anchor or equivalent for support and further emotional and practical support is provided. Signposting is also provided.	**Early Action:** With challenges addressed, family can use support from family and friends to access opportunities that enable them to move towards a family who thrives.	

Estimated resource hours

33 hours	49 hours

- In the slide where an early action response is outlined, years 1 and 2 are similar, but years 3 and 4 are prevented.
- This shows the importance of early action support for the parent and the implication this has on the whole family
- It shows the benefit of proactive money management rather than crisis debt recovery
- The parent only receives support in year 4 once there is intervention because of the children.
- By year 4 it is difficult to move out of crisis

Service Resource Implications

- Every one hour of early action support could replace 3.5 hours of crisis intervention: 294 hours of staff time across various public sector services vs 82 hours over same, 4 year period

Figure 2: Comparative representation of service expenditure patterns in two alternative service delivery models over a four-year period: Crisis support *versus* Early action support
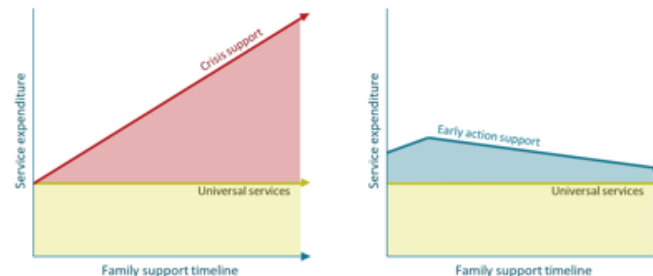
- The above graphs show the difference in approach between 1 hour of early action compared to 3.5 hours of crisis intervention
- The concept of embedding early action is not new, but this evidences its potential impact
- The graphs are a simplified representation of the expected investment trajectory of the two approaches over a four-year period, such as the period described in the family illustration. The pattern of escalating expenditure in the graph on the left is a common pattern in the current system of support, with expenditure peaking at the height of a crisis. The second graph anticipates the likely pattern of expenditure when effective early action is the model of support provided to the family. In the early action model, the peak of support occurs early so as to avoid escalation towards crisis and flatten, and in time reduce, a family's requirement for support services. The rapid response associated with early action is designed to avoid crisis. A person-centred, early action ethos supports individuals to overcome 'bad patches' and aims to strengthen the family and its resilience so that they can better cope with further challenges when they arise.

Key characteristics of family-led support
- We must value people who have empathy and listening skills. It is often people who are less well paid who drive the success of this type of advisory work
- It is important to build trusting relationships. People need time to explore issues and the opportunity to talk about anything
- Enable access through a communication channel that suits the individual (Facebook, email, phone, face-to-face meeting)
- Listen without judgement
- Support access to services and information at the right time for the individual, which requires the Project Officer to have a breadth of knowledge about available support
- Maintain an open door to enable potential follow-up if further support is required
- The focus has been on delivery through schools, but aspiration for the project to also go through health visitors
- It is important to normalise this type of family support

Success factors
- Parents are able to build up a trusting relationship with a support worker
- Time is available to enable this to develop and to explore issues
- Support is located in universal services, in a familiar setting, close to families, with whom they should already have a relationship
- Support is available to staff within these universal services
- Staff are supported by partners if there's a need to escalate issues
- Staff have a close working relationship with a school's senior management team, working collaboratively to identify families and encouraging them to access support
- Staff have a close working relationship with social work to ensure that families are getting the level of support that is required. It is important not to duplicate work and to have a clear separation with the role of statutory services.
- There is very clear signposting to and communication around the most appropriate service to provide particular supports in order to avoid duplication or gaps
- Operate like a third sector organisation which is independent from statutory services. It is important that families don't associate Anchor with any particular service. However, being positioned within public services helps build relationships with other bodies

Model of support
- The model needs to be adapted to suit different geographic environments. It will be slightly different in different contexts
- A drop-in model of support can be suitable for primary schools where the majority of families live within walking distance of the school, however this is dependent on parent/carer health or confidence among other things
- The provision of support in rural area and secondary schools requires support within the school, but also outreach support to families. There needs to be flexibility in the model to adapt to these contexts
- Resource needs to be further discussed, but they see this process as being about decluttering rather than adding additional resource and additional services

Anchor describes the vision for change in a series of statements that describe what success will look like:
- The support available to individuals in Shetland is enabling and kind
- When Shetland's residents encounter difficult to overcome challenges, early interaction with potential support is the norm
- Friends and families play a vital and widely recognised role in the provision of support
- Where support from services is sought, the presumption is that support will be delivered in a local community-based setting that creates a comfortable environment for the individual
- The support system works with an individual using a strengths-based approach and targets improvement in an individual's confidence and capacity to act
- The organisation providing support services operate under a 'no door is the wrong door' policy

- The individual is listened to. What an individual says they need is listened to and the whole household is considered
- The value of time spent with an individual to build a trusting relationship is recognised as a good investment by service providers. Engaging in simple practical helpful actions can be transformative
- The individual receives tailored and flexible support that meets their needs and is matched to their capacity to act
- The individual experiences a seamless transition from touch point interactions to, where appropriate, working with more specialist services on issues at the core of experienced challenges
- Professionals and support workers have a wide knowledge base, supported by learning on the job, the sharing of best practice, and good relationships between services

Following a presentation by the Anchor Project, the following points were raised during discussion:
- This is a good example of what the Christie Commission envisaged in action
- Recognising the value and work of support workers is so important – sometimes the person with the statutory duty isn't best placed to act
- Statutory duties are sometimes seen as having most to offer, but we can also see impact through the de-escalation of crisis
- Crisis has a huge price tag in terms of outcomes for individuals, not just in terms of resource and hours
- Sometimes families haven't had positive relationships with schools or parents didn't have a good relationship when they were at school so it can be difficult to empower head teachers to change that
- There is PEF (Pupil Equity Funding) available in some schools, but it can be difficult for head teachers to know how to approach families
- There are political issues with state intervention in family life and this is not always straightforward
- In order to get it right for every child (GIRFEC) the family role must be recognised, supporting families before they reach crisis point
- This work would help a named person to identify need
- GIREC is the right approach, but staff – especially in universal services – do not always have capacity to deliver. The Anchor Project is helping provide that capacity in Shetland
- This is a very low-level interaction which is different to the named person role. Anchor can join the dots and bridge those conversations between families and professionals
- The services exist already, so it is mainly about support to access services and signposting (financial advice, fuel and energy advice, emergency food provision). There were additional services that people needed during the pandemic, but the main thing that is missing now is more money in peoples' pockets
- CAB has an important and trusted role to play in Shetland
- You can look at how the Promise Scotland seeks to give families a voice and empower families too. Families want to be heard
- The cost of living is high in Shetland
- Benefits which are based on a national picture do not necessarily work for people in Shetland

- Electricity and limited energy suppliers are big concerns over the next 12 months
- The ideology behind identifying families through schools was that it is a universal service that all families come into contact with. They are often the hub of the community, particularly in rural areas
- Sometimes there can be social stigma, particularly in rural areas, but Anchor is trying to ensure that parents feel comfortable with seeking support. It is important to normalise seeking this type of support to remove any stigma. There are also practical measures that can be taken like meeting in the home rather than at school. Services can be delivered quite anonymously, e.g. by zoom
- Particular issues faced in rural areas include energy costs, travelling to work, availability of quality jobs, old housing stock which is not energy efficient (old, detached buildings which need heating all year round). Some parents cannot afford to drive children to school if they miss the bus or collect them from after school activities, because fuel is too expensive
- It makes a difference if you can tackle these struggles before debt is accumulated
- The project spent a lot of time developing relationships between partners on their Board – this has helped to embed real partnership working and is seen as a crucial element of the Project's success.
- Positioning within the public sector helps alleviate any data sharing issues and provides an opportunity to tap into other corporate support
- There has been a strong commitment and attendance at meetings from all partners from the outset and even at the height of the pandemic
- Shifting spend to more preventative models is challenging but it is proven to work and the graphs show it can be evidenced