

# WITHOUT WALLS

Facing the challenge of poverty in York

Wednesday 27 March, 4pm -6pm

The George Hudson Board Room,

West Offices, Station Rise, York YO1 6GA

- 4:00 p.m.**     **Welcome and introduction** – Councillor James Alexander, Chair of Without Walls.
- 4:10 p.m.**     **York's assessment of poverty** from Stewart Halliday, Head of Strategy, Partnership and Communication, CYC.
- 4:25 p.m.**     **Poverty and Social Exclusion – JRF perspective** Julia Unwin CBE, Chief Executive, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- 4:35p.m.**     **Stamp out Poverty Campaign** – Steve Hughes , Editor, York Press talks about the objectives of the programme
- 4:45p.m.**     **Introduction** to breakout table discussions from Kersten England, Chief Executive, City of York Council.
- 4:50 p.m.**     **Topic 1:** How can we become a more affordable city?  
**Topic 2:** How do we eliminate the stigma attached to being in poverty?  
**Topic 3:** How do we become a living wage city?  
**Topic 4:** How can we address destitution?
- 5:15 p.m.**     **Plenary session** introduced by Kersten England - Summing up and next steps
- 5.55p.m.**     **Closing remarks** from Cllr James Alexander
- 6.00 p.m.**     **Close**

Without Walls sets out and ensures the delivery of a long-term vision for York

The meeting was opened by **Councillor James Alexander**, Chair of Without Walls. He reaffirmed that one of the council's key priorities was protection of vulnerable people and creation of a fair and inclusive city for all. He reminded delegates that the Fairness Commission had recently provided an important insight into the existing issues of poverty, life expectancy, crime and social inclusion in York. As an organisation, the council were particularly under pressure to meet the needs of those struggling with debts, the lack of affordable housing and rising living costs. He added "We know that the number of residents at risk of falling into poverty is increasing at a rate beyond the ability of the council, in isolation, to manage. However, it is clear that with a city-wide approach, this is a problem which is ultimately surmountable. We have today made a firm collective commitment to do everything in our power to ensure poverty is eradicated in York. Its now time to get on and deliver."

**Stewart Halliday**, CYC Head of Strategy, Partnership and Communication, confirmed that the current poverty challenge followed on from the work that had initially been started by WOW in 2007 to develop an anti-poverty strategy for the city. These foundations had informed a number of citywide initiatives including the child poverty strategy. More recently the Fairness Commission had made recommendations for the city to act on in terms of reducing inequalities. There was also a huge raft of plans and strategies in place that were linked to the poverty agenda.

He stressed that it was important to renew WOW's focus on poverty for 2013 because of the challenges faced as a result of cuts to public sector funding, higher levels of personal debt and welfare reforms, which were predicated on economic upturn. There were now over 4,500 children living in poverty in York, with over 60% of these in working households. There were several wards, including Westfield, Clifton, Hull Road, Heworth and Guildhall, where child poverty was most prevalent. However, there was also an increasing problem of single pensioner households facing fuel poverty and issues relating to debt, yet their population were spread across the city and would make targeting support more difficult.

The strong correlation between poverty and ill health was reiterated, with men in the least deprived wards living 10 years longer than those in the most deprived wards. It was also highlighted that long term unemployment was on

the increase and that there was an increasing number of young unemployed people. The pay gap was widening between the highest and lowest paid and low paid jobs in the tourism and retail sector along with growing numbers of part time work, particularly amongst women, presented a greater risk of people falling into poverty.

The Welfare Reform focus on employment and modernisation had been welcomed, but the reforms came at a time when decently paid jobs were in short supply and effectively meant a cut in benefits for many people. Media coverage of the issue of benefits also seemed to be cultivating the notion that claimants were 'scroungers' or 'undeserving poor'.

Housing continued as a key issue with house prices still rising (average house price now £182,000) but with salaries stagnant (Ave income £22,500). The private rented sector in York had doubled since 2001, consequently it cost more to rent rather than buy in York. The waiting list for social housing was increasing and homelessness and rough sleepers were on the rise.

Coupled with general cost of living increases, the facts were sobering, however York had a stronger than average local economy. This together with the capability of the city's partners and its history of benevolence and compassion meant that the ambition to eradicate the effects of poverty was an achievable goal.

The Chief Executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, **Julia Unwin**, responded with the Foundation's perspective on poverty and social exclusion. She described the nature of change, economic slowdown and welfare reform as the 'perfect storm'. That Universal Credit and digital by default would hit the most vulnerable; non payment of rent direct took away security and this at a time of spiralling food and fuel prices and 'murky' labour market. The shortage of housing was driving rent increases; graduates were chasing poorly paid jobs; poor were pitted against poor; the evidence was not disputed.

The picture of poverty was very different to that of 2008. People were only just coping and were very vulnerable to sudden crises, due to the removal of benefits. Longer term this would lead to increasing destitution and already the number of food banks in the city was on the increase.

Anti-poverty strategies were generally designed to address four issues:

- Maximise income / benefits and charitable funds;
- Map out routes in to work;
- Ensure accessible financial / debt advice;
- Reduce living costs

The Anti Poverty Strategy for 2013 would also need to include:

- How to respond to destitution; and,
- Collecting information (as destitution hides).

Nationally, direction would not change and the current notion that political wind would change should be parked. There would also be no massive economic change and the labour market would trap people in poverty. As a result all Partners would need to poverty proof their decisions. There would need to be a focus on prevention, cost reduction for food, fuel and finance and encouragement for local employers to pay the Living Wage.

The JRF were to embark on a major new poverty research programme aimed at filling gaps in evidence. The Foundation was also a small employer, so would do other work to ensure their staff got the best possible advice. In addition, as an anti-poverty landlord they would not contribute to destitution and aimed to overcome the stigma attached to being in poverty through positive communication campaigns. JRF fully supported the drive to eliminate poverty and would support WOW in whatever way they could.

**Steve Hughes**, Editor of York Press, talked about their evolving 'Stamp Out Poverty' Campaign. Initially there had been opposition to the campaign as people felt there was no point as there would always be poverty. However, York had a caring history and the Press were keen to tap into this and the Fairness Commission recommendations and to become an agent for social change. Their objectives were to raise awareness of and to relieve poverty and bust the myths surrounding the so called 'shirkers' and 'scroungers'. They share the view that housing is very important and that costs within York are

unaffordable for many. The Stamp Out Poverty Campaign news archive was an educational resource which was being added to on a daily basis.

Payday loans, thrifty living, healthy food options etc. – the Press could be the vehicle by which to spread the word regarding support and engineer social change and they would be proud to play their part alongside other Partners.

**Kersten England**, Chief Executive of City of York Council, thanked the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and York Press for their contributions and confirmed how proud she was to have both organisations in the city. It was key that Partners worked together to improve outcomes for the young, women and pensioners. That housing and mitigating the effects of outward migration from London would be a priority so that the city's children could afford to remain in York. Without Walls' role would be to craft a response to the context which had been set out and interventions would be sharpened.

## Breakout table Discussions

Partners were invited to join discussion tables on the following themes:

**Topic 1:** How can we become a more affordable city?

**Topic 2:** How do we eliminate the stigma attached to being in poverty?

**Topic 3:** How do we become a living wage city?

**Topic 4:** How can we address destitution?

A summary of the issues discussed within each topic area follows.

### Topic 1: How can we become a more affordable city?

York, like other successful cities, cost more to live in, however disparity had become worse and that needed to be kept in mind. In addition, that the JRF suggestion to check 'What does this do to the poorest people?' was important.

#### Overarching comments

- Tension – success and growth
- Poverty proof everything we do
- Articulate the case for why we need to eradicate poverty
- Integration and incremental improvement – highlight why change makes sense

#### Housing

- Keeping moving keeps you poor

#### Education

- Money management and financial capability are key

#### Finance

- Budget assistance and intervening early

#### Food

- Linked to foodbank usage – learn to cook, learn to buy
- Knowledge is key (all ages and all situations)

#### Collective Improvement

- Discount schemes – e.g. energy - collective action was needed. Partners act as brokers to help individuals get better deals

#### Fuel

- Offer a package of measures – be imaginative
- Fuel switching should go hand in hand with support to insulate properties in the private sector
- Accredited landlord scheme should be used to improve energy efficiency of private sector rented properties
- Energy generation
- Intervene collectively for those with pre-payment meters who want to change payment method

## Topic 2: How do we eliminate the stigma attached to being in poverty?

Initially the group highlighted some experiences of poverty and various coping mechanisms that had helped. One of the main issues is that the stigma means people frequently do not access the support, for example those who have no previous experience of poverty but are made redundant. Some people have a particular view about being seen to be 'claiming' any available benefits. The experience of poverty can get in the way of people making the correct decisions for their new circumstances.

Key issues:

- Stigma of admitting to friends and family
- Poverty is about the inability to benefit from society
- Need to address the invisibility of those who can't speak for themselves
- BUT we need to hear a view from those who are actually poor, often we hear from others who think they know what people need. The debate becomes about them not by them
- All experiencing poverty – are not necessarily viewed in the same way, there is a view often in the media about the deserving and undeserving poor
- Poverty can be well hidden, for example those who experience in poverty in affluent wards where they may experience isolation from social interaction, difficulty of accessing transport as well as low income

What action we could take:

- Address the fear attached to talking about/admitting to poverty
- Address the language used about poverty
- Incorrect / inappropriate reporting should be challenged
- Improve Education, early intervention and access to services and advice in a way which meets different needs as does not pre-judge people
- Highlight examples where people have managed to get out of poverty, real examples make it easier to understand concepts

## Topic 3: How do we become a Living Wage City?

**What is the message - Why do it?**

- Becoming a LW employer is a journey, it takes time, it can't happen all at once
- The message needs to be about all the *good business reasons* for doing it – not preaching from the moral high ground
- It is a challenge to do it for sectors with marginal profits

- There are sound economic arguments – which can be communicated by locally based financial services businesses such as Aviva, national retail chains such as LUSH and contracted public service providers in sectors such as care
- And everybody wins (see Benefits below)
- On the way to becoming a LW employer there are other ways to support employees in difficult times e.g. by operating staff benefit scheme using salary sacrifice, by operating fair T&Cs etc

### **Barriers**

- People fear that they can't afford it and it will undermine the viability of their business/organisation
- They can see that it is complicated and would be hard work – don't know where to start
- They may not be aware of the real benefits experienced by Living Wage employers
- They feel 'preached at' and criticised if the message comes from outside the business sector
- Beware the public/private sector divide

### **Benefits**

#### ***Good for Business***

- ***Increased employer loyalty/Less staff turnover*** (Two thirds of employers report a significant impact on recruitment and retention within their organisation)
- ***Less staff sickness*** (absenteeism down by approximately 25%)
- ***Improved motivation and performance*** (80% of employers believe that the Living Wage enhances the quality of the work of their staff)
- ***Ethical benefits for the business of being known as a Living Wage employer*** (70% of employers report that the Living Wage has increased consumer awareness of their organisation's commitment to be an ethical employer – with a positive effect on consumer choices)

#### ***Good for the Individual – feeling more valued***

- ***Financially*** - The Living Wage helps people to provide for themselves and their families – avoiding benefit dependency and/or working several jobs/long hours
- ***Professionally*** - 75% of employees reported increases in work quality as a result of receiving the Living Wage.
- ***As part of the organisation*** - 50% of employees felt that the Living Wage had made them more willing to implement changes in their working practices; enabled them to require fewer concessions to effect change; and made them more likely to adopt changes more quickly.

### ***Good for society***

- The Living Wage should be part of a range of ways to help people out of poverty and reduce the harmful effects this has on their health, happiness and life chances.
- A Living Wage allows families to have more time to spend together and to be part of their communities
- The living wage reduces the corrosive effects that income inequality has on society overall

### ***Good for the York economy***

- People will have more to spend in the local economy

### ***Good for the national economy***

- The Living Wage will reduce people's need to claim benefits and therefore reduce the national welfare bill

### **Communicating the message**

- **Through business networks (YEP, Business Forum etc)** – not the council or other public sector employers - must be led by businesses who have done it and can say, why, how and what benefits they have experienced
- Offer from **CVS** to advise and support third sector organisations wanting to understand how they could become a Living Wage employer
- The Press **Stamp Out Poverty** campaign

### **Support for business**

- Develop network and information resources that can help other businesses work out what's best for them/how to do it
- Collaboration/consortium approach to staff benefits and business overheads

### **Research required**

- Official views of relevant regional business organisations
- Survey of small businesses (e.g. Cocoa House)
- What are supermarkets doing? Morrison's?

### **Possible actions**

- Develop a support communications pack – to be used through the business networks to communicate the LW message
- Look at ways that CYC/partners could collaborate to take some costs away from small businesses (e.g. HR/payroll overheads) – that might make paying the LW viable for them
- Look at consortium approaches to other employee benefit schemes (e.g. salary sacrifice)
- Employee Benefit Fair – for employers to sign up
- Research official views of e.g. CBI, IOD, Chamber of Commerce

- Conduct survey of small businesses in York to find out how many already pay LW
- Set up a York Living Wage Brand and sign-up scheme
- Enlist YP in the campaign – Features on businesses and personal case studies

## Topic 4: How can we address destitution?

It was felt that there were two key issues; however the discussion did not focus on one or the other but a more general discussion which picked up both points. The issues were:

1. How do we prevent people becoming destitute; &
2. How do we support and work with people who are destitute.

Often people who are or are about to become destitute will have fallen out of the system and will not be engaging with 'core' services.

Need to ensure that there is an all agency approach to working with those most in need and at risk of becoming destitute, it was felt that churches, food banks and the voluntary sector would be critical to supporting these individuals as there is likely to be a feeling that the system has failed them and therefore are unlikely to willingly (at least in the early stages) engage with formal services.

Services we have historically had to support people who were destitute have evolved and whilst providing an important service now, they no longer provide the service they originally did. Arlight was given as an example of a service that has evolved to a structured service with SLA's which (whilst important when considering the funding provided) do, to a point, prevent a flexible and responsive approach to what is happening on the ground.

### Potential Solutions

It was felt that appropriate supported housing was critical to any solution. The element of security felt from having a roof over your head, even if it was shared and temporary, was felt to be the potential olive branch to engaging with individuals. However, it was clear that there needed to be rules, and that this was something for something.

It was felt that when considering the potential supported housing solutions, whilst acknowledging it would be expensive, there could be a case for intensive supported housing in the same way that some authorities provide supported accommodation for those at risk of losing their home from ASB, i.e. a dedicated block of flats for short term 24/7 intensive support, but need to be clear on the something for something bit so that this is not just seen as another homeless hostel.

There was also discussion on understanding the unintended consequences of policy and planning decisions. Two examples were given:

- 1) New student housing at the university, a planning restriction means it can only be used for students, preventing (if its empty) it's use for temp supported housing;

- 2) Impact of Article 4, currently policy means that if a landlord doesn't let to students, they are more likely to leave it empty for a year rather than let it as a family home and lose their HMO status.

### **Prevention**

Key point here is to understand the cost of not doing anything.

We need to better use the data that we have to understand those at risk and ensure appropriate targeting of our collective limited resources.

Final point was that we live in a city that has a history of giving and is there a way to tap into this to provide a route for people to give within the city to support city projects. It was felt that this needs to be 3<sup>rd</sup> sector led so as not to create a situation where people accuse CYC of cutting budgets whilst at the same time accessing voluntary giving to support services.

The example that was given was the OAP winter fuel allowance, it was felt that there would be a significant number of people who receive the allowance who don't need it and if a credible and accountable route was in place they would give it up if they could see where it was going and what good it was doing. Was there an option of a 'JustGiving' page for people to support named projects?

Kersten England confirmed that discussion output would be taken, shaped and brought back to Without Walls in June.

### **Closing Remarks from Councillor James Alexander**

The city would not become too paternalistic, instead assistance would be available to help make people self-reliant and to enable them to access employment. Anyone could suddenly find themselves in hard times, but there were too many separate initiatives, when what was needed was a holistic approach. Local Authorities also needed greater ability within the region to work together with Jobcentre Plus. The strength of Partners working together would reduce the cost of living for our residents and there would be continued support to grow our economy and get people into jobs.

## Attendance List: facing the challenge of poverty in York – 27 March 2013

Aitchison	Gavin	News Editor	York Press
Alexander	James	Councillor	Labour Leader of the Council
Brittain	Tom	Head of Housing Services	City of York Council
Collingwood	Jane	Strategy and Development Officer	City of York Council
Cullwick	Chris	Reverend	York Community Chaplaincy
Davies	Rhian	Policy Officer	City of York Council
Ellwood	Caleb	Youthwork Leader and Foodbank Coordinator	Gateway Church
England	Kersten	Chief Executive	City of York Council
Forbes	Sandra	Business and Economic Intelligence Manager	City of York Council
Gibson	Jill	External Relations Manager	Jobcentre Plus
Gillies	Ian	Councillor	Conservative Group Leader
Guest	Ian	Chief Executive	South Yorkshire Credit Union
Halliday	Stewart	Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Communication	City of York Council
Hughes	Steve	Managing Director	York Press
Jeffrey	Rebecca	Advisor	York Citizen's Advice Bureau
Kelly	Patrick	Chair	York@Large
Kimkeran	Stirling	Chair	York Economic Partnership
Mellors	Colin	Pro-Vice Chancellor	University of York
Portz	Angela	Chief Executive	York Council for Voluntary Service
Ring	Fred	Trustee	York Racial Equality Network
Runciman	Carol	Councillor	Liberal Democrat Group Leader
Sanderson	Rita	Director	York Racial Equality Network
Simms	Denise	Strategy and Development Officer	City of York Council
Simpson-Laing	Tracey	Councillor and Chair	Health and Wellbeing Board
Swinburn	Gwen	Economic Development Advisor	Independent Consultant
Unwin	Julia	Chief Executive	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Vickers	George	Manager	York Citizen's Advice Bureau
Waddington	Steve	Assistant Director Housing and Community Safety	City of York Council
Winward	Lisa	Superintendent	North Yorkshire Police