

A large, stylized illustration of two hands shaking, rendered in a dark purple color. The hands are positioned behind the main text, with one hand at the top and the other at the bottom, their fingers interlocking in a firm grip.

A HAND UP, NOT A HAND OUT. CHILD POVERTY IN HARROW.



We cannot say we have fair competition when some people have to run a 100 metre race with sandbags attached to their legs.

– Ha Joon Chang

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FOREWORD

Dr. Andrew Howe



Each year, as the Director of Public Health, I have a responsibility to deliver a report that looks at the health and wellbeing of the people in Harrow. Coming up with a report that doesn't just churn out the same old data is important because I want the my annual reports stimulate readers and make them want to take action. This year my annual report focuses on the topic of child poverty and is accompanied by a short film that illustrates the issues.

Poverty is damaging to children's health. Children living in poverty are at a significant health disadvantage because being poor negatively affects developing physiological systems.

We know from research that living in poverty can have detrimental health consequences that are severe and lifelong. This is linked to multiple health problems that can be costly to treat and cause outcomes that can limit economic potential. And that's not all, it feeds into an unremitting cycle affecting generations.

Giving children a healthy start pays off in health and well-being. This is not just important for children and their families, but for society as a whole.

But what has this to do with Harrow? We are fortunate to live and work in a place that is, on the whole, healthy and compares well with other boroughs on many indicators. However, this hides some stark differences that make it difficult for some Harrow children to thrive. In this report, I want to show you some of the

issues that lead to children living in poverty and some of its impacts. I also want to show you that there are things that, collectively, we are doing to help our residents get out of the poverty trap but as ever, we could do more.

I have asked my team to work with our partners, and with the people and the organisations in Harrow to look at what we can do that will make a difference. We are facing unprecedented pressure on our budgets and so it won't be a case of giving money or grants. We need creative, sustainable solutions to help people help themselves. As one local resident said "we need a hand up, not a hand out!"

I hope you enjoy reading this report and watching the short film that accompanies it and I hope you will join with us to make a difference to children living in poverty in Harrow.

What is child poverty and how does it relate to inequality?

Child poverty is defined by the experience of material deprivation and lack of financial resources which can be driven by factors such as low pay, changes to in-work benefits, problem debt and worklessness.



With poverty affecting one in four children in the UK - about 600,000 children in London – that’s a whole lot of missed opportunity for them and us.

We all have images of what poverty looks like: it might be the pre- welfare state poverty of the 1930s; Victorian era poverty, or the numerous nameless faces of starving children in developing countries. But in a affluent society as modern day Britain and a borough such as Harrow, what does poverty really look like?

Sociologist Peter Townsend summed it up when he wrote “Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies in which they belong.”

In affluent societies, therefore, poverty is about a lack of resources. Poor people lack capital: physical capital (property ownership); human capital (education and skills) and social capital (connections among individuals). However the defining characteristic of poverty is financial capital, since money allows people to compensate for the other shortfalls in their lives.

A number of social and health problems, including, lower life expectancy, reduced social mobility, higher rates of obesity, mental illness and infant mortality and lower levels of trust, have been shown to worsen in unequal societies.

This ensures that not only do children living in poverty not achieve their potential, society as a whole misses out too.

What does this mean in reality?



Families at the poverty line have £79 less per week than families on average income.



Three-year-olds in households with incomes below about £10,000 are 2.5 times more likely to suffer chronic illness than children in households with incomes above £52,000



In 2015-6, the Trussell Trust gave out 1,109,309 three-day emergency food supplies given to people in crisis. Over 110,000 were given out in London – almost 40% to children.

Drivers of child poverty



There are a number of factors that are driving child poverty now. Many of these have a long term impact and drive poor children to grow up into poor adults. Thus the cycle continues. Children who grow up in poverty are four times as likely to become poor adults, becoming the parents of the next generation of children living in poverty. These are the difficult issues we need to tackle if we are going to make a difference.

Child poverty drivers

The main driver for child poverty is a lack of sufficient income from parental employment, which restrict the amount of earnings a household..



Long term worklessness can cause difficulties in returning to work. For many the longer the lack of employment continues, the lower the confidence levels drop. Add to this skill loss and possible employer bias makes it difficult to get back into the work routine.



Unemployment isn't the only issue. Working insufficient hours and/or for low pay is a particular problem in Harrow. Harrow residents earn less than the average salary of their counterparts in London and the UK as a whole. As a result, many people work out of the borough, incurring high transport costs which may then negate their higher salaries.



Leaving school with no or low qualification levels limit the range of employment opportunities and the wages that could be expected. It can also make adults less likely to want to return to adult education and skills development opportunities which could facilitate them into better paid work.



Larger families require higher levels of income to avoid poverty. They have a need for larger housing which is both difficult to find and much more expensive in Harrow. The welfare reforms have exacerbated this leading to high levels of residents becoming homeless.



The costs of childcare can also restrict parental employment due to the expense. A lack of awareness about in-work benefits perpetuates this belief.

Drug & alcohol dependency, although affecting only a small proportion of the children in poverty, will have a profound impact on both parents and children.

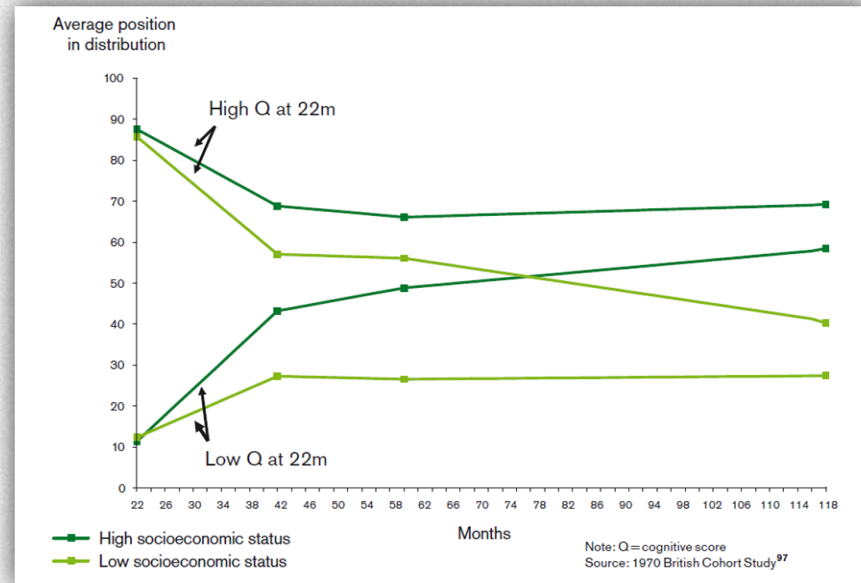


Parental ill health or family instability which can both reduce the number of parents whose earnings contribute to income, and also mean the remaining parent's employment options are more restricted due to caring responsibilities either for the child or the disabled family member.

How does growing up in poverty affect children?

Undoubtedly, there will be children who thrive despite the poverty in which they have grown up. But for many others poverty means a childhood of insecurity, educational underachievement and isolation from their peers

Inequality in early cognitive development in the 1970 British Cohort study at age 22months to 10 years



Source: 1970 British Cohort Study

The graph illustrates the impact of social inequality on the cognitive development of children.

The British Cohort Study followed the lives of people born in a single week in 1970. Children's cognitive development was measured at different time periods beginning at 22 months and proceeding for 10 years.

By the age of six (74 months), the 'less bright' children from higher

socio-economic groups performed better in tests of cognitive-ability than 'bright' children from lower socio-economic groups.

This early disadvantage for children in lower socioeconomic groups went on to predict final educational outcomes and therefore future life chances.

**Poverty is like punishment for a crime
you didn't commit.**

— Eli Khamarov, writer

What does child poverty look like in Harrow



Case study: Family A

Mrs A is a lone parent with 6 children ranging from 16 to 5 years old. Her eldest children have been in contact with the criminal justice system and all of the children had poor school attendance.

Mrs A came to Harrow 17 years ago and had been a housewife and mother and had never worked. Her husband left her to return to his homeland and she had been unable to work due her youngest children being under school age and she had no childcare help.

She was in receipt of Child Benefits, Child Tax Credits, Housing Benefits, and Income Support & Council Tax Support. The family were referred to the Together with Families programme and worked with Xcite, Reed and Harrow in Business.

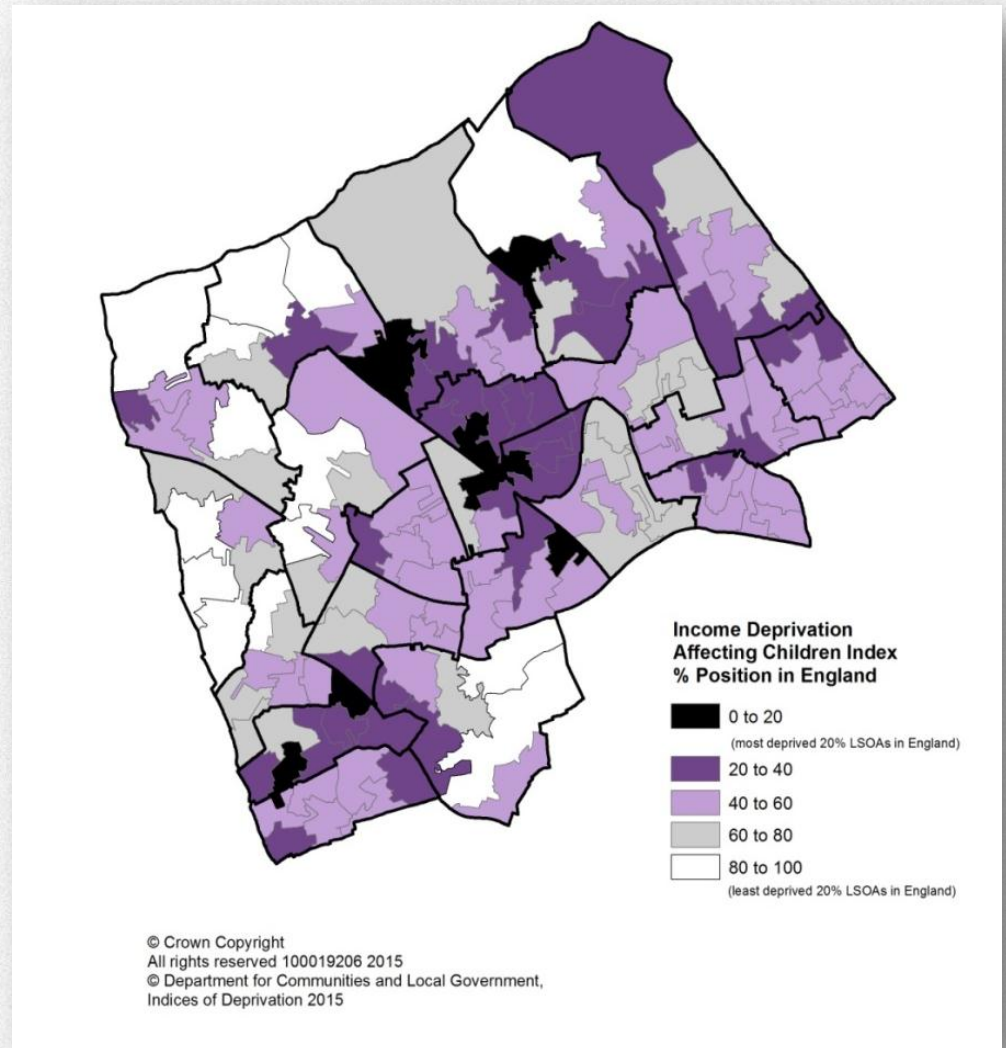
She was helped to boost her confidence and improve her mental health. She was helped with job applications and CV writing and to write a business case to start a garment-making business which would allow her to work from home.

She is now growing her business through word of mouth.

Child poverty drivers in Harrow: Income deprivation

The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) measures the proportion of all children aged 0-15 years living in income deprived families. Income deprivation affecting children follows a similar pattern to income deprivation in general. Overall the picture of income deprivation affecting children is varied, with LSOAs in each of the quintile bands.

Seventeen percent of children in Harrow live in families experiencing income deprivation. The highest concentrations of deprivation are in central and south-west parts of the borough, Harrow's most deprived LSOAs for income deprivation affecting children, which are in the 10% most deprived in England, are in Marlborough and Wealdstone and Roxbourne wards.

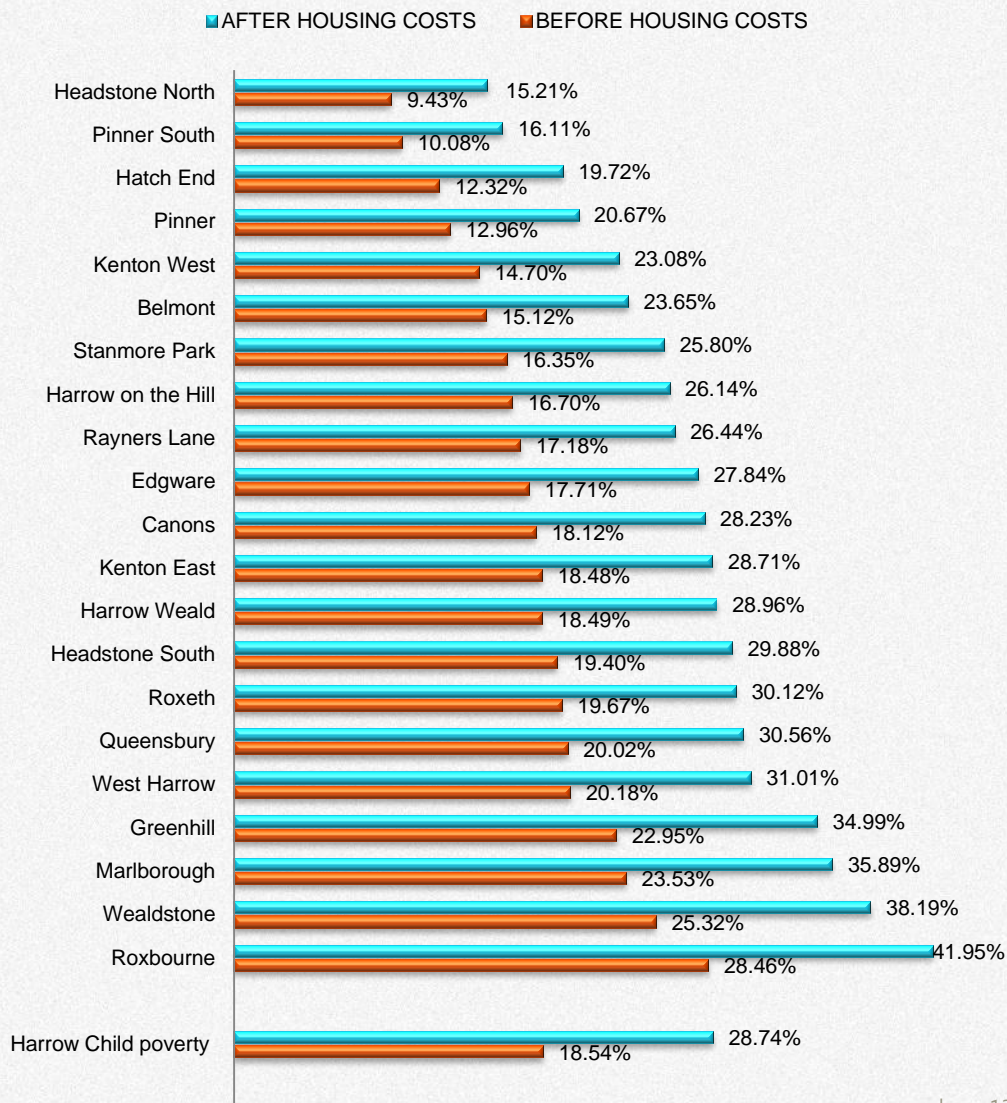


Child poverty drivers in Harrow: Housing costs

As with the rest of London, private sector accommodation – both to rent and buy – is unaffordable to Harrow residents on average or lower incomes. For many households private sector rents are only affordable with Housing Benefit (HB) support and for some (larger families and young singles) are facing stark choices: move to smaller affordable housing in the borough (if available) and/or cut household expenditure on other items or move outside London to a property that meets their actual needs.

For those who can afford to live in Harrow, the cost of housing itself can also push children and families into poverty as see on the graph opposite. On average, there is a 10.2% increase in the proportion of children pushed into poverty after housing costs have been met. However, in Roxbourne, Wealdstone and Marlborough where child poverty is already highest in the borough, the increase is even greater.

Percentage of children in poverty in Harrow before and after housing costs, Oct-Dec 2013

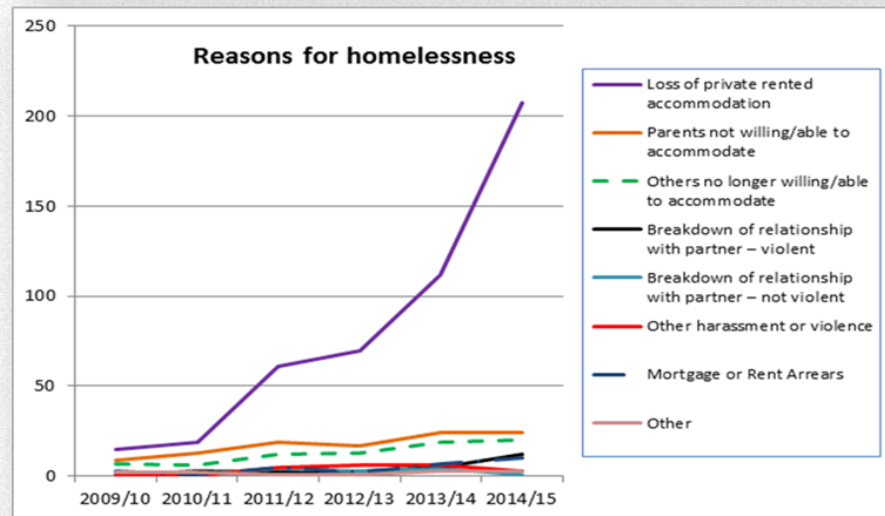
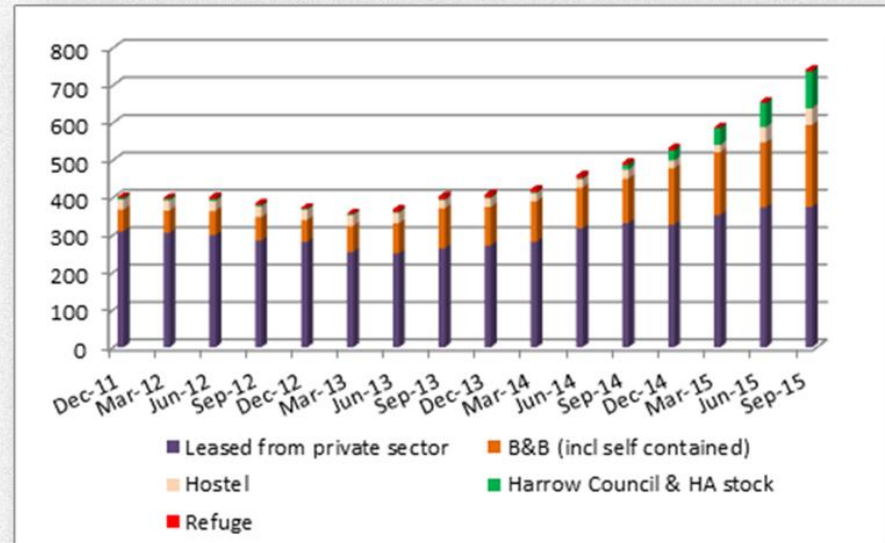


Child poverty drivers in Harrow: Housing and homelessness

Unlike the rest of London, Harrow has a very limited social housing stock. The number of social housing properties becoming available for letting each year are small and, this means that the options of social housing are currently only available to those deemed to be most in need. These are households who are generally on very low incomes i.e. welfare dependent.

There has been a significant rise in the number of people needing temporary accommodation in Harrow largely due to loss of private rented sector housing. This has resulted in unprecedented numbers being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation.

Of the 1,100 children in temporary accommodation at the end of 2015 who were in households in receipt of housing benefit, more than half were in households where parents were in work.

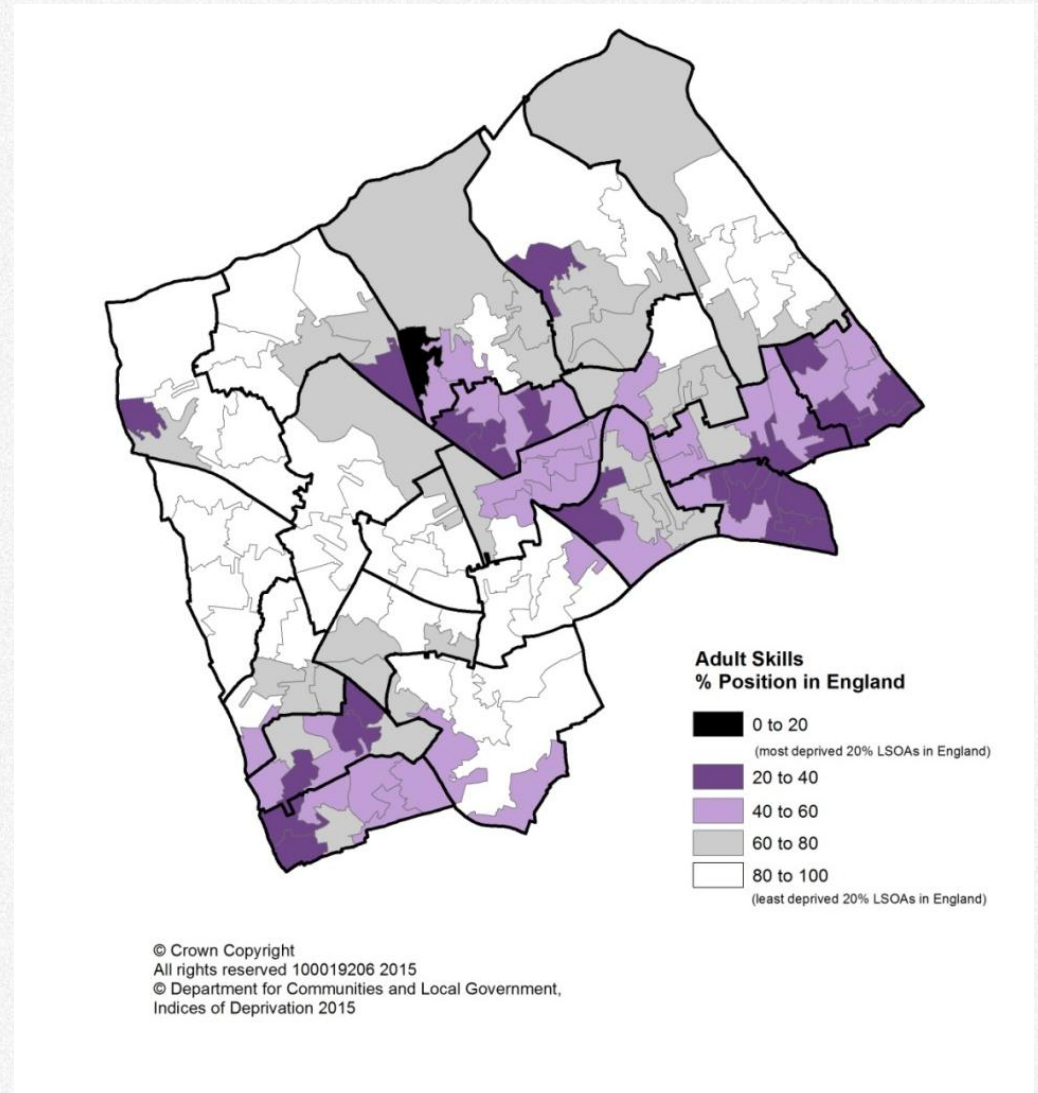


Child Poverty Drivers in Harrow: Language and skills barriers

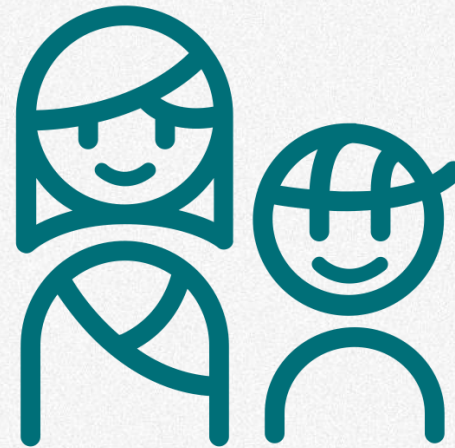
Having no or low qualifications and /or poor English language skills can block paths to higher paying employment.

Wards in the east of the borough such as Kenton West, Kenton East and Queensbury West wards have higher levels of residents who cannot speak English and as a result score high for this measure.

Harrow's worst ranked LSOA for adult skills is also one of England's most deprived 20% and is in the Harrow Weald ward – the area covering part of the Headstone Estate. Three of Harrow's top ten ranked LSOAs for low levels of adult skills are in Roxbourne ward. Adult skills levels are worse in the centre, southeast and south-west of the borough.



What does child poverty look like in Harrow



Case study: Mrs Z

Mrs Z is a lone parent with a son who is at primary school. She receives housing benefits, child tax credits and child benefit. She had been unable to find work due to child care issues.

As a previous volunteer at her son's school, she wanted to get a job there which would allow her to work during school hours.

The Xcite advisor helped Mrs Z write a speculative letter to the school's head teacher and create a new CV.

At first she heard nothing but when some jobs were advertised, the excite advisor called the school to inquire about her speculative application.

After tough interview, Mrs Z got the job she wanted and is now happily working near her son.

Poverty is an opportunity to provide an opportunity. It's an opportunity to kill the worm that eats away at children's hearts, minds and self-esteem.

Compassion.com

Some examples that support the child poverty agenda

Harrow's **Together with Families programme** began in April 2015 and helps families resolve complex issues and implements earlier interventions that can prevent families problems from escalating.



Children's Centres provide universal, targeted and specialist services tailored to the needs of the local community. They play a big role in supporting the lives of children in the borough to have the best possible start in life.



Harrow's **voluntary sector** provide advice and support on a wide range of topics to people in Harrow.



Healthy Start is an important means-tested scheme providing vouchers for pregnant women or parents with a child under four. The vouchers can be spent with local retailers.



Xcite is an employment programme, providing a full range of support to help Harrow residents back into work by identifying and overcoming any barriers



Foodbanks give clients three day's nutritionally balanced, non-perishable food but they offer a lot more than food. Volunteers give a listening ear and signpost to other charities and agencies to help resolve the underlying causes of their crisis.



Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Transformation project aims to improve emotional, behavioural and mental health outcomes for children and young people of all ages, and all levels of need.



What next?



In this report, I have set out to raise the issue of Child Poverty in Harrow. Growing up in poverty can seriously impact a child's emotional wellbeing, physical health and educational attainment with long lasting effects into adulthood.

Children who grow up in poverty are four times as likely to become poor adults, becoming the parents of the next generation of children living in poverty. Harrow's housing, transport and childcare costs make it harder for low income families and many low skilled workers to survive on their incomes. Tackling child poverty needs to be a priority because of its short and long term consequences for children and for local areas.

There are persistent pockets of deprivation and child poverty in Harrow. We know from our services that work with vulnerable children and young people across Harrow, and our research and policy work, that it is often a combination of factors combined that have cause child poverty resulting in detrimental effects on a child's long term outcomes and life chances. Poor housing, unemployment, language barriers, debt and rent arrears, are all associated with poverty in Harrow.

Our next step has to be to develop a child poverty strategy and action plan for Harrow; one that all partners buy into so that together we agree what we need do to mitigate child poverty and ensure that every child in Harrow has the best opportunity to meet and fulfil their full potential.

My team has organised a workshop to explore the issues locally. We need to look at the ways we can break the cycle of child poverty to give children in Harrow a better chance.

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Pictures are from the Noun Project. (www.thenounproject.com)

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**Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity.
It is the protection of a fundamental human
right, the right to dignity and a decent life."**

**— Nelson Mandela,
Former President of South Africa**