Centre for Social Justice Response to Child Poverty and Improving Life Chances – Consulting on a New Approach

Key recommendations
This response to the consultation has a number of recommendations contained throughout, however we would ask that the following three ‘headline’ recommendations be treated as essential guiding principles to our overall position.

1. The Child Poverty Commission’s remit should be focused on family policy and it should be renamed the Family Poverty Commission.
2. Early intervention is essential for long-term systemic change.
3. Targeting the five pathways to poverty is essential: family breakdown, educational failure, worklessness, serious personal debt and addiction to drugs and alcohol.

Context for our response
Before addressing each of the nine questions in turn we should state that we welcome many emphases in this consultation document, particularly the Coalition’s aim of developing a long-term strategy to tackle decades of inter-generational disadvantage and their recognition that this requires new approaches. This also describes the overarching objective and methodology of the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ).

Our 2007 report, Breakthrough Britain¹ was the culmination of an extensive consultation over 18 months examining the crucial five pathways to poverty that we identified as well as a sixth area, the role of the voluntary sector in fighting the causes of poverty. The five broad pathways that we identified and continue to emphasise are family breakdown, educational failure, worklessness, serious personal debt and addiction (to drugs and alcohol).

This work was fully evidence-led. Each of the five pathways was covered in detail by individual working groups involving over fifty people, including those with first-hand experience of fighting poverty as well as academics and other experts. The consultation process involved three thousand hours of public hearings (held in Westminster and around the UK); over three hundred site visits to national and overseas projects and institutions; written submissions from over two thousand organisations and polls of almost fifty thousand people.

Since the publication of Breakthrough Britain, we have followed a similar methodology to produce policy solutions in 14 other areas (including housing, criminal justice, asylum seeking, violent gang culture, early years). These all adopt our central approach towards tackling poverty which focuses on addressing its multiple and interlocking causes in an integrated way.

Child Poverty versus Family Poverty
As the consultation document states, ‘this depends on everyone working together’ but it also requires being honest about what is driving poverty – the importance of the family as

¹ Centre for Social Justice, Breakthrough Britain: Ending the costs of social breakdown, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2007
well as education and an absence of money. To this end we consider it more accurate and meaningful to use the phrase ‘family poverty’, as we explain in our response to Question 5. However, we agree that the strategy must also consider which children face the highest risks of socio-economic disadvantage and how key policies affect them (paragraph 4.2).

We are therefore in complete accord with your statements in paragraph 1.1, that a new approach should focus on root causes and on giving parents, families and communities the means and opportunities to help themselves out of poverty. In addition, we concur with the statement in paragraph 2.4 that ‘It is by addressing the issues of educational failure, welfare dependency, worklessness, and family breakdown that we can provide the conditions that will allow families to move out of poverty.’

Similarly we welcome the recognition that, in order to address these ‘multi-dimensional causes’, an approach broader than simply focusing on income targets and static income-based measures will be required (paragraph 4.2).

**Question 1: What do you think are the key points from the Frank Field Review which the Government needs to incorporate into the child poverty strategy?**

In common with Frank Field’s team, we found a large body of evidence\(^2\) to support his conclusion that:

‘...children’s life chances are most heavily predicated on their development in the first five years of life. It is family background, parental education, good parenting and the opportunities for learning and development in those crucial years that together matter more to children than money in determining whether their potential is realised in adult life. The things that matter most are a healthy pregnancy; good maternal mental health; secure bonding with the child; love and responsiveness of parents along with clear boundaries, as well as opportunities for a child’s cognitive, language and social and emotional development.

Good services matter too: health services, Children’s Centres and high quality childcare. Later interventions to help poorly performing children can be effective but, in general, the most effective and cost-effective way to help and support young families is in the earliest years of a child’s life.’\(^3\)

We agree that money should be focused on the most disadvantaged and the early years. At present, the UK is typical of many OECD countries which spend on average, twice as much money during middle childhood as during early childhood, and 2.3 times as much during late childhood as during early childhood.\(^4\)

**Recommendation 1**

The consultation paper suggests, and it is a view we share, that Sure Start Children’s Centres could be incentivised to re-focus on their original purpose and identify, reach and

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provide targeted help to the most disadvantaged families (whilst maintaining some universal services so that Centres are socially mixed and non-stigmatising). In several of our reports we have described the need for family service hubs\(^5\) that serve communities in the very bespoke way that will best meet local needs. We therefore welcome Field’s recommendation that Local Authorities should aim to make each Children’s Centre a hub of the local community.

We believe that there is great potential for Children’s Centres to serve their communities in a far wider range of ways, for example by providing couple relationship education as well as the more typical parenting education. Just as extended schools have diversified their community offering, we consider that ‘extended Sure Start’ could offer a vital complement to the family justice system.

There is a lot of interest in making mediation meetings mandatory where couples are separating and children are involved and also in courses that help such parents keep their children at the forefront of their minds. An awareness of their children’s emotional needs can make parents more motivated to avoid overt conflict. Given the reduction in availability of legal aid, many low-income couples will have less access to the courts to resolve disputes, and so an early intervention approach that reduces the escalation of conflict is essential.

A conflicted home environment can hinder children’s psychological and educational development, so co-locating these and other quasi-legal services in Children’s Centres (which can also operate as contact centres) increases their accessibility for families who would otherwise struggle to find and pay for them.

**Recommendation 2**
It is our view that locating health services (especially midwives and health visitors) in Children’s Centres ‘joins up’ local provision and helps to facilitate the social mixing described earlier (this was also part of the original vision for Sure Start).\(^6\)

**Question 2: What are your thoughts on the best way to incorporate early intervention into the child poverty strategy? (Note: We expect that the Graham Allen Review’s interim report will be published before our consultation closes on the 15th February 2011. Respondents are welcome to include any reflections on the report in their responses).**

Our own work (some of which was carried out with Graham Allen\(^7\)) emphasises, in the words of the Allen report, ‘giving a social and emotional bedrock to the current and future generations of babies, children and young people by helping them and their parents (or other main care-givers) before problems arise.’

**Recommendation 3**
We also consider it essential that the most effective Early Intervention Programmes should

be identified and promoted, with assistance for organisations that have developed promising programmes to enable them to achieve the necessary evaluation and accreditation. This is especially important in service categories that currently have few providers, as the example in the box below illustrates.

**Coming alongside young fathers-to-be**

There are few programmes to help young fathers-to-be, although Graham Allen made the point that ‘Health and early years services need to do more to ensure that expectant mother and fathers are offered high-quality community-based preparation for parenthood that includes learning about the needs of babies during pregnancy and early life and how to make the successful transition to parenthood.’

UToo, a 2010 CSJ poverty-fighting Award winner runs such programmes to help young fathers-to-be. It used the Award money to fund a rewrite of their course so that it could gain accreditation and be made available to other agencies that would then be eligible for funding. Although they completed the rewrite using National Open College Network’s Progression Units, the current restructuring of acceptable qualifications might mean that the Units used are no longer available. If this is the case, they will fail to receive accreditation. Smaller organisations who are trying to establish the validity of a programme and have designed it according to recognised tenets, may still struggle to obtain the necessary accreditation for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with programme effectiveness.

**Recommendation 4**

In a similar vein we have recommended that a future UK Government commissions a long-term study, similar to the New Zealand Dunedin Study, comparing the development of cohorts of children with and without early intervention to inform the policy as it develops.8

**Recommendation 5**

We are also in favour of making Family Nurse Partnerships more accessible to vulnerable first time mothers who meet the criteria and expanding the health visitor population so that all new parents get the help they need from respected professionals. This is a commitment of the Coalition Government which we have recommended in several different reports.

One of which, *Breakthrough Britain: the Next Generation,*9 was written wholly with an early years perspective in mind, and emphasised the importance of relationships in children’s lives. Thus, we recommended the fostering of families instead of children, keeping children with their biological families where possible in order to avoid disrupting attachments (for example by providing supported housing where failed tenancy is a key reason for breaking up the family). This could also entail encouraging older parents from the local community to act as extended family in whatever capacity is necessary (with training and support from social services).

We also emphasised the importance of common, inter-agency training to enable better integration of services (in line with the recommendations made in Lord Laming’s two

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reports on addressing shortcomings in child protection\(^\text{10}\) as well as training for all professionals whose work impacts upon children which grounds them in the neuroscience involved in the very early years. This would, for example, make daycare facilities more child-focused, emotionally responsive and motivated to provide greater continuity of care.

**Recommendation 6**
The development of infant mental health services which also work with parents (for example to remedy bonding difficulties) is also a priority.

**Recommendation 7**
We recommended that there be a simple but broad-based media campaign, centred around the concept of a ‘Neuron Footprint’ to put awareness of the brain’s development during the early years at the heart of the nation’s thinking on young children.\(^\text{11}\)

**Recommendation 8**
As we have been invited to make comments with reference to the Field and Allen reports, we should also point out that a serious and concerning gap in both was their neglect of the need to reduce family breakdown where possible. As stated earlier, a strategy to reduce poverty has to look at tackling its key drivers: worklessness, debt, educational failure, addiction but also family breakdown and lone parent family formation.

Family stability and low income are closely linked – family breakdown significantly increases the likelihood of poverty. Sixty per cent of lone parents receive housing benefit\(^\text{12}\) and 40 per cent receive out-of-work tax credits,\(^\text{13}\) compared to 10 per cent of intact couple parents in each case. Poverty also contributes to family breakdown. Using data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), low income couples – both married and cohabiting – with children under five are twice as likely to split up, compared to the average couple of the same marital status.\(^\text{14}\)

Father absence also tends to lead to worse outcomes for children, not only because of fathers’ roles as co-providers of financial and other resources, but because they make a difference to children’s sense of identity, self confidence and many other aspects of their welfare. In an early report from the Family Law Review\(^\text{15}\) the CSJ describe the wealth of research demonstrating the importance of fathers, how they provide a distinctive role in parenting and how fatherhood itself is essential for drawing men into dependable and responsible adulthood.

**Recommendation 9**
Therefore, as strong relationships between parents are vital, a poverty strategy needs to

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concern itself with family process as well as family structure. **Couple relationship education**, as mentioned earlier, can strengthen relationships and provide important and culturally sensitive principles for maintaining loving and mutually respectful relationships through the many vicissitudes of life in general and parenting in particular.

In addition, it has to be recognised that explicit commitment between parents is an important protective factor against relationship breakdown and that childbearing within marriage provides the most likely context in which children will experience stability.

The last census found that 97 per cent of all couples remaining together throughout their child’s minority were married. Only 3 per cent were cohabiting. These statistics underline the view of many sociologists that ‘growing up with two continuously cohabiting biological parents is rare’, a ‘social fact’ that should not be ignored in an effective poverty strategy. Moreover, Kathleen Kiernan, Professor of Social Policy and Demography at York University, states that children of cohabiting parents are more likely to live in different de facto step-family arrangements because their parents were more likely to split up than married parents and that ‘We know that the more transitions, or experiences like this, that children have, the more detrimental it is to their wellbeing.’

Children’s wellbeing greatly influences their later adult wellbeing and doing all we can to improve it is crucial to breaking the dependence of children’s outcomes on those of their parents and thus to tackling intergenerational disadvantage.

**Question 3: Do you agree with our working definition of socio-economic disadvantage?**

The definition of socio-economic disadvantage is accurate and we agree on the importance of linking parental resources, access to meaningful activities and relationships to future outcomes. We should not concentrate solely, or even primarily, on simple income based measures. To reiterate, the CSJ’s work has demonstrated that socio-economic disadvantage is strongly correlated with certain behaviour within families and households, including chaotic lifestyles, disrupted or dysfunctional relationships, addiction, worklessness and health/mental health issues. These will act as barriers to children’s flourishing regardless of income levels.

**Question 4: Are these the right areas for the child poverty strategy to cover?**

**Recommendation 10**

The broad categories are highly relevant to eliminating poverty, although as we say in our response to the next question, there needs to be a greater emphasis on tackling the roots of parental and family disadvantage. These are the five pathways to poverty we identified earlier as family breakdown, educational failure, worklessness, serious personal debt and

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18 Frean A, ‘Unmarried families are more likely to fall apart,’ *The Times*, 5 February 2005
drug/alcohol addiction. When the parent or the whole family system is the focus of intervention, the child is likely to benefit proportionately more.

In addition, the specific desired outcomes within each area, and the indicators used to measure those outcomes, need clarification. While it may be the case that many are addressed through a wide-ranging programme of reform, indicators to measure the success of these reforms in delivering outcomes will be essential for effective policy delivery. An appropriate indicator under each category is given below:

**Early Intervention:** The number of children entering primary school ‘school ready’ in terms of their communication, social and behavioural skills.

**Employment and skills/Financial support:** While income is important, the source of income is also highly relevant (whether it is from benefits or work). The number of children in a workless household is an important indicator of future employment prospects.

**Devolving power:** The ability to accurately target resources toward those that need it, and have those resources employed effectively will need to be monitored by a range of social indicators (crime, health, education) within a community or local wards. In identifying where to target resources, weak indicators clustered around a family or location are highly likely given the interrelated factors or economic dependency, educational failure, addiction and family breakdown.

The CSJ would be very pleased to comment on and help to develop the final set of outcomes and indicators outside of income that are relevant to child poverty.

**Question 5: Do you agree that the role and the remit of the Child Poverty Commission should be broadened to reflect the new approach?**

It is our view that even retaining the title *Child Poverty Commission* skews the remit of this body away from its essential focus on the causes of poverty, almost always moderated by family factors, and risks its effectiveness as a valuable source of policy advice to Government.

**Recommendation 11**

We would recommend redefining the Commission through a statutory instrument so that it becomes the Family Poverty Commission.

As has been recognised in this consultation document, numerous reports and commissions have challenged the notion that income transfers alone can continue to significantly reduce the numbers of children in poverty. They have, moreover, shifted attention towards the importance for children of nurture, relationships and aspirations, all of which ideally take place within the family context.
As Lord Freud argued during the Second Reading of the Child Poverty Bill,20

‘Child poverty is not a concept commonly used in European social policy. This is not surprising as children normally do not have income or wealth themselves. It sounds great; it is a compelling soundbite; and in March 1999, when Tony Blair first announced a goal to end child poverty in a generation, it captured the imagination of the country.

However, there are two ideas at war with each other within the soundbite: the first concerns general poverty and minimum standards of living for citizens; the second is about child well-being. It is dangerous to put the two together in the unthinking way that new Labour has done, not least because we risk undermining the strategies that matter most for child well-being.

We urgently need to get those strategies sorted out. According to UNICEF we are ranked bottom of 21 rich countries in child well-being despite spending more and being richer than most of them. Not half way; the very worst.’

The shift towards a family focus was apparent in the third reading of the Child Poverty Bill when principles guiding the previous Government’s strategy were clearly stated: that work is the most sustainable route out of poverty, that families and family life should be supported and that early intervention is necessary to break cycles of deprivation. All these principles require a focus on strengthening and stabilising the family, and not only on children per se.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has also drawn attention to the need to change strategy if progress is to be made. According to the JRF, ‘the strategy against poverty and social exclusion pursued since the late 1990s is now largely exhausted’, identifying the key turning point when it started to run into trouble as early as 2004-05, well before the recession.

The Family Poverty Commission should embody that change in strategy and be entirely focused on the causes of poverty and disadvantage at the family level. These causes have been broadly defined as family breakdown, educational failure, welfare dependency, drug and alcohol addiction and serious personal debt.

**Question 6: What do you think makes the most difference to the life chances of children?**

We strongly agree with the need to consider the key drivers of life chances itemised by the Commission, including the home and family environment, early years and education, health, and support and advice around training and work, which all impact on children’s development and opportunities as they grow up. We also welcome the recognition that strong relationships between parents are vital for children (as the consultation document says, children raised by parents reporting high relationship quality

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20 8 Feb 2010: Column GC97, Grand Committee, Monday, 8 February 2010. Child Poverty Bill. Committee (5th Day)
and satisfaction tend to have high levels of well-being) and reiterate the need to prevent family breakdown.

The CSJ’s recent publication on mental health\(^{22}\) emphasises that family breakdown in all its forms is strongly associated with poor mental health in adults and children, yet is unacknowledged in the Government’s mental health strategy launched in February 2011. Previous reviews have also established the importance of children’s mental health to their future life chances. For example, our work on children in care\(^{23}\) found that they are four to five times more likely to struggle with mental health issues than their peers,\(^{24}\) and that there is a clear correlation between a failure to resolve these problems and poor educational attainment, unemployment, and criminality among care leavers.

During our ongoing review of the youth justice review the CSJ has collated strong evidence that many children are being unnecessarily criminalised for minor misdemeanours. Criminalisation can severely damage a child’s life chances; there is evidence that it increases the likelihood of reoffending\(^{25}\) and in too many cases the possession of a criminal record, even for minor offences, operates as a barrier to certain areas of employment and training. Although in recent years initiatives have been introduced in some areas to divert children who commit low level crimes from the system, we have found that practice is highly variable and many children are continuing to slip through the net.

Members of the CSJ Poverty Fighting Alliance of grassroots voluntary sector organisations were asked a very similar question as part of the Frank Field review: ‘What aspects of children’s early years are the most important determinants of positive outcomes and good life chances?’ and many of them will also be submitting individual responses to the Child Poverty Consultation. A summary of their responses is shown in the box below.

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<tr>
<th>‘What aspects of children’s early years are the most important determinants of positive outcomes and good life chances?’</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. Family and Relationships</strong></td>
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<td>• <strong>Structure and stability of the family</strong></td>
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<td>The importance of having a stable family environment with two parents was stressed by many charities. Reasons given ranged from the increased resources (time and money) enjoyed by two-parent families, the greater likelihood that those families would have an adult of the house in work, and the great value of having a father-figure at home, if that father is a positive influence. Parental conflict was noted as being particularly detrimental (for example by Bristol Community Family Trust).</td>
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<td>• <strong>Emotional stability of the parents</strong></td>
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The mental health and emotional stability of the parents was cited by many as a key factor in determining outcomes for a child (for example by Family Links and Family Matters York).

- **Parenting skills**
  Parenting skills, knowledge and appropriate expectations impact on outcomes for the child.

- **Quality of adult/child relationships**
  Affirmation, love, warmth, reliability and commitment were all cited as determining factors.

- **Significant, positive adult role models**
  The presence of a committed father-figure in early life, who sets a good example by respecting women (and the mother in particular), was seen as crucial. Also, the ability of parents to manage their lives – work, relationships, healthy leisure time, money management – was felt to have a direct bearing on whether children learned these skills or not (for example, in the work of the Kings Arms Project).

- **Inter-adult relationships**
  How the parents interact with and talk about their neighbours, and whether they model relationships that are trusting or transient, affect how well the child is able to develop wider relationships later in life (as noted by Eden Openshaw). Several charities highlighted the importance of growing up in a family that operates as part of a wider network (community, church, wider family) as this exposes the children to the ideas of difference and ‘other’, and allows them to learn a good cultural value system. Later in life, this can lead to a healthy appreciation of diversity, equality and fairness (reflected, for example in the work of Safe Ground).

2. **Learning and Development**

Outcomes for children are also affected by:

- **Identification (or non-identification) of learning needs at an early stage**
- **Parental interest and involvement in education**
- **Early stimulation**

Time investment in young children is essential, with reference made frequently to the importance of conversation, being read to, listening to music, and interactive play. It was noted by several charities that it is especially important for children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds to be exposed to the broadest possible range of positive experiences, and that we should find ways for them to observe the full spectrum of possibilities for adult life.

- **Competencies that lead to positive outcomes**
  Several different life-skills were cited as essential to instil in children from a young age to give them the best chance of success and protect them from the main causes that lead to young people dropping out of society. Among these life skills were: the ability to follow a routine; the understanding of and respect for boundaries; the value of education as a means to success; the ability to use time constructively; and the ability to be an autonomous learner.

- **Values**
Learning positive pro-social values such as honesty, compassion, self-respect, humility, etc, is an important process for a child. A child that is able to exercise these qualities is better able to interact and socialise in a positive and constructive way, to form and maintain stable relationships with peers, and to grow, learn and interact with those in authority as well as people from other cultures and backgrounds.

**Question 7: Are there additional measures, compatible with our fiscal approach, which could help us combat poverty and improve life chances?**

The CSJ’s recent report *Outcome-based Government*\(^\text{26}\) emphasises the need to:

- Assess all programmes that exist to mitigate poverty. Those with no evidence base should no longer be funded (they may even be exacerbating problems) and the money should be refocused;
- Make sure programmes have clearly identifiable outcomes and objectives;
- Align activity along an approach that tackles the five pathways and not just on redistributing income.

**Question 8: What further steps can be taken to help local authorities and partners to reduce poverty and improve life chances?**

We make some general comments and then highlight the importance of housing, but again we have a bank of policies in 14 areas available to view at our website (www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk).

- **Emphasis on collaboration between all agencies working with the most vulnerable families.**

Local authorities should be the natural facilitators of a collaborative effort between services to provide wrap-around support for children growing up in disadvantaged families. Most local authorities have yet to implement successfully a ‘team around the family’ approach.

Certain farsighted schools and housing associations have stepped in to fill this gap, coordinating statutory and third sector agencies involved in the lives of relevant families. Hyde Plus has pioneered the Packington Families Project on an estate in north London – a scheme that has gone through a rigorous evaluation process and is now in its third cycle. The Living Well Trust, an alternative education provider in Carlisle, is part of an equally successful ‘team around the family’ initiative with various schools and statutory agencies in the local area.

Integral to this would be information sharing on vulnerable families between relevant agencies, and the support being provided (e.g. something similar to the Edinburgh Common Client Outcomes Database that all homelessness services in Edinburgh use, as a requirement of their tender).

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• Recognition by local authorities of the unique positioning of the voluntary sector which allows them to have particular success in radically transforming outcomes for children in the most vulnerable families.

First, such organisations are relational. Their success comes largely from the fact that charities tend to work on a one-to-one or small group basis with their clients, investing in people over a longer period of time, and developing individual, tailored solutions that work for a particular person or family. Scale and resources do not afford this luxury to most statutory agencies.

Secondly, they are innovative and can take risks. The voluntary sector can move quickly in response to emerging local needs, as they are less hindered by the bureaucracy that accompanies statutory initiatives. They can also work with individuals and families that are deemed the ‘riskiest’ as a result of the relatively low likelihood of seeing quantifiable transformation and positive change in the short term e.g. long term homeless or drug addicts.

Thirdly, they have a greater reach, by virtue of the fact that they are not statutory. The most vulnerable families are wary of engaging with people or organisations that are perceived to be statutory, as they fear (rightly or wrongly) that they will have benefits, their home or their children removed from them. Where help is only offered from statutory agencies, many will choose not to seek help at all. The negative fallout of this is severe, and ranges from serious debt to family breakdown and mental health issues. Third sector organisations are seen as comparatively approachable, and are therefore often the ideal gateway service for a family in crisis.

Fourthly, they have an ability to inspire voluntary support from the local community on a large scale, providing the relational support, befriending, mentoring and low-level interventions that are essential as part of a preventative or early intervention approach. The charity Home-Start is a case in point; it mobilises large numbers of parents who mentor and offer low-level support to parents of vulnerable families.

Children’s need are commonly categorised into four preventative levels, from universal levels of need at Level 1, escalating to Urgent/Acute Crisis and High Priority Needs at Level 4. Evidence gathered shows that Level 2 and 3 children who tend to receive little or no intervention will tend to move into Level 3 and 4. But those whose parents are helped by Home-Start volunteers are often stabilised at Level 2, and are mostly prevented from reaching Level 4.

• Longer-term contracts for effective voluntary sector partners.

Where proven and effective voluntary sector solutions are identified at local authority level, these organisations should be given adequate funding and longer-term contracts. Short term contracts undermine the effectiveness of charities, as they are obliged to spend an unhelpful amount of time and resource on chasing further funding in order to continue to deliver services on which the local population (and local authority) is dependent. Short-termism often reflects an inherent mistrust of the voluntary sector by the public sector, which is felt by many of the most outstanding community-based voluntary sector organisations. Some of the best voluntary sector organisations possess indisputably the most valuable subject expertise, local knowledge, and local relationships. Longer-term investment would send a
positive message that this is recognised and valued, and would free them to focus on more
effective delivery.

- **Supporting (with both rhetoric and resources) the provision of vocational
  training that is employer-led (i.e. sensitive and responsive to the needs of
  local employers).**

Vocational training centres are closing across the country due to lack of funding, with
nothing to replace them. Local authorities should assess the skill needs of local employers,
and support the training centres, alternative education providers, charities and social
enterprises that build up the work force with these relevant skills.

Alongside this is the need for good, locally appropriate careers guidance and employment
brokerage. Community organisations, such as Five Lamps in Stockton-on-Tees, are often the
best placed to bridge the gap between employer and employee when it comes to working
with people who are furthest from the job market. Their personal approach both to the job
seeker and to their pool of local employers has led to Five Lamps’ notable success at helping
people into sustained employment.

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**Tackling housing poverty**

Council estates were once places of aspiration. In the early 1980s, council tenants’ average
income was 73 per cent of the national average, and there were those in even higher
income brackets who lived there. For some working families, social housing became a
stepping stone to eventual home ownership, especially once right-to-buy began in the early
1980s. Social housing functioned as a ladder of social mobility.

Between 1981 and 2006, however, the proportion of social tenants of working age in full-
time employment fell from 67 per cent to 34 per cent. What we have now is a lack of a
critical mass of working families with aspirations of social mobility. Today more than two-
thirds of social tenants are among the poorest 40 per cent of the population. Children who
grow up in social housing often see little purposeful activity being modeled by adults.
Council estates have become ghettos of the poorest and neediest. Instead of being a ladder
for social mobility, today more than 80 per cent of people living in social housing were
within the sector ten years earlier.

The CSJ’s report, *Housing Poverty,* argued that there needs to be a fundamental shift from
seeing social housing as simply providing a roof over people’s heads, important as that is.
Housing policy must become part of broader social policy which aims to get people back to
work and in a position to help themselves, their families and communities.

Our policy recommendations include several of the following points:

- First, we need to address the shortage in affordable homes. Local authorities should
  be freed and central allocations rules relaxed to create the conditions to produce a
greater quantity of housing, especially for first time buyers and people on low
incomes. This includes being able to secure the quick release of surplus public sector
land for new housing developments, and to speed up the planning permission
process.

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We might increase the stock in housing by noting that many social homes are under-occupied, often because parents continue to live in large family homes after their children have left. There is no question of forcing such families to move, but more could be done to provide incentives and help for people who want to move to more suitable accommodation or are willing to do so. Freeing up family homes in this way would help tackle over-crowding problems and contribute positively to the family environment of many of the most poor.

- Secondly, we need urgent steps to secure a wider mix of tenures on social housing estates. A diversity of tenure means a diversity of income and social mix, and the possibilities of transformed communities that are no longer outlying ghettos of the poorest and neediest. In order to allow such mobility, however, we must end the requirement that social housing tenancy be secure for life, and rather alter it, so that it can adapt to the needs and aspirations of the tenant.

Councils should be free to sell homes where they so wish, either outright or on shared ownership terms, for example to create more mixed communities or to generate receipts. They should fully retain the receipts for investment in housing improvement, new social housing in other parts of their area or other social projects as they judge necessary.

- Thirdly, we recommend that the homes offered to people requiring financial support with their rent should not be distinguished by design or location — so called ‘tenancy neutral’ design. Their tenure should be flexible enough to change as the household’s circumstances change. In order to achieve this, the first barrier to break is that of the ‘affordable homes’ requirement, and the freezing of tenure associated with it. A well-maintained and successfully managed environment is critical to the success of a neighbourhood.

- Fourthly, we want to encourage employment and economic independence in the social sector. Greater efforts are needed to help economically inactive social housing tenants who want to be self-employed to build their own businesses or be engaged economically.

This will mean that housing managers should become socially enterprising specialists in meeting the support needs of the most vulnerable. They should act as advocates for social and economic mobility. This should form part of a more personalised, nuanced system of allocation, which allows prospective tenants to be able to select the services they need to set them on the road to fulfiling their aspirations.

**Question 9: How can the voluntary, community and private sectors contribute most effectively to local approaches to tackling child poverty and improving life chances?**

As we stated in our response to Question 8, a coordinated approach between all agencies contributing to the wellbeing of a child in a vulnerable family is essential (note Packington Families Project).
In collaboration with the local authority, alternative providers of services to disadvantaged communities need to identify particular local needs, where local provision is failing to meet the needs of the community, and the reason for this failure. Where there is a strong local third sector solution that is effective (and cost effective) but that needs to be scaled up to meet the needs of the local population, the local authority should support these effective measures rather than replicating what already exists.

Bearing in mind the unique qualities of the voluntary sector cited in Question 8, voluntary sector initiatives should be considered in the first instance for low-level interventions and, in particular, for any situations where mentoring, befriending and long-term personal relationships would have a significant impact on the outcomes for a child or a family. Many low-level interventions, if provided early, prevent the development of problems which require more sophisticated interventions at a later stage.

### Examples of issues that could be led by the voluntary sector

**Networks**
Those with no social network are the most likely to drop out of society (e.g. young people leaving care). The Rock Trust in Edinburgh is pioneering a Networks project that helps young homeless people with no networks, by working in group sessions and on a one-to-one basis to help them build relationships.

**Transitions**
Managing key transitions (primary to secondary, secondary into work) is essential. Social services and schools together are best placed to identify children who are particularly vulnerable at this stage, but there are outstanding charities that work in schools (but independently) that would be best placed to provide support for children and young people at these crucial times.

Below we cite five charities that are delivering excellent support to parents, children and young people, and which when combined would provide wrap-around support for those growing up in the most disadvantaged families:

- **Magic Breakfast** provides free hot breakfasts in primary schools that have over 50 per cent of children on free school meals. This means all children have an equal start each morning, and their hunger does not undermine their mental capacity to behave properly, focus and engage in learning and school activities.

- **School Home Support** engages parents informally through an independent school-based liaison person, and works with children in school as a mother figure and informal counsellor. The charity also has a welfare fund which can be accessed on behalf of a family in need, when the impact of the family’s material poverty is having a negative effect on the child, e.g. they have been known to buy a mattress if the child is falling asleep in class because he or she sleeps on the floor at home.

- **My Generation** runs the Step Up programme, which offers 14 hours of academic support to children struggling in school. It is particularly successful as it engages with parents as well as children, and builds adult homework into this remedial intervention.
- **IntoUniversity** offers high-quality academic after-school support so that postcodes or parental educational attainment do not determine a child’s educational outcomes.

- **Family Links** offers the family relationship support in schools and community centres that allows parents and children to collaborate and improve family relationships through the Nurturing Programme.

For further information about this submission please contact Dr Samantha Callan, Chairman-in-Residence (Family, Early Years and Mental Health), via samantha.callan@centreforsocialjustice.org.uk or 020 7340 9650