



NEWS RELEASE

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BREAKING THE CYCLE OF DEPRIVATION AND CHILD POVERTY

A child poverty report *'Breaking the cycle'* focusing on new measures to speed the eradication of child poverty, was launched at Westminster last week by The Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities (SIGOMA) - an alliance of 45 leading city and town councils spanning the north, midlands and southern coast.

SIGOMA member authorities suffer because funds to local authorities are not based on social need. Because of the high levels of deprivation in SIGOMA areas and the lower than required level of funding, there are particularly detrimental effects being felt by their communities in terms of achievement and wellbeing of children and young people.

Even as it uses the Child Poverty Bill to graft new statutory duties on local councils to tackle child poverty, the government is expected to confirm that it is not planning to provide new resources for them as it is felt that this is work that should already be being undertaken. However, SIGOMA's argument is that their member authorities are severely disadvantaged by the current funding formula and the priority should be based on need rather than historic criteria.

Neil Turner MP, chair of the SIGOMA parliamentary group, said: "Unless our councils are given the funding to really tackle child poverty in the next decade, then the risk is that the gaps in economic opportunity and educational outcomes for children and young people in many deprived areas will only be allowed to worsen. The government and opposition parties must put the effective resourcing of local authorities at the heart of their long term strategies for ending child poverty.

"Education attainment in SIGOMA is significantly below other parts of the country. Free school meals (FSM) are used as a proxy for deprivation, however it is not only pupils eligible for free school meals that are lagging behind in SIGOMA areas. In fact, only 27.5% of non-FSM pupils in SIGOMA gained 5 A*-C GCSE grades compared to the national average of 49.1%," he added.

SIGOMA is calling on the government to raise the rate of educational attainment by allocating funding to schools based on need rather than past spend. It is also asking for improved employment and pay opportunities by the increased supply and demand of well paid good quality jobs through joined up strategies for enterprise and economic development. There should additionally be support for low wage workers to be able to afford to stay in work and consequently progress into better paid higher quality jobs.

Cllr Stephen Houghton, leader of Barnsley MBC and chair of SIGOMA said: "Blair famously said *"Education, education, education"* was the priority for his new Labour government and Clinton said *"It's the economy stupid"*. I believe they were both partly right and it is a combination of the two – education and the economy – that will put an end to child poverty in this country."

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

A copy of the report can be obtained on the SIGOMA website.

SIGOMA is a campaigning network of urban local authorities; we are open to all metropolitan districts outside London and to urban unitary councils sharing similar characteristics with our existing members.

We have metropolitan and unitary councils with a total of 45 members, stretching from the north-east and north-west, through Yorkshire and the Midlands to the south-west coast. Our members have a combined population of 13 million people, making SIGOMA one of the largest special interest groups (SIGs) within the Local Government Association (LGA) and accountable for about 25% of local government spending in England.