

Child and Family Poverty: Assessing Service Provision in Hotspot Wards across Nottinghamshire

October 2011

Executive Summary

During April to August 2011, a management trainee at Nottinghamshire County Council was asked to help identify services and activity taking place in Nottinghamshire's target child poverty hot spot wards. The purpose of the activity was to assess any areas of good practice, and any gaps in provision, and to help embed the Child and Family Poverty Strategy into core practice of local services.

This was an experimental piece of work designed to investigate child poverty hot spot wards, it is not as comprehensive as we would like but it is hoped that partners can use elements of the issues contained within the report to aid them in their service planning and delivery.

The work had a number of limitations including omissions from a number of key services and interventions such as housing and health. In addition many services collect data but not at ward level so in many cases this data was not included within the report.

Using 2008 child poverty data, eight wards were identified as target hot spots because their levels of child poverty were over 30%. These included:

Ashfield:	Bassetlaw:	Gedling:
Kirkby in Ashfield East – 35.5%	Worksop South East – 38.8%	Killisick – 37.8%
Mansfield:		Newark & Sherwood:
Cumberlands – 30.2%		Boughton – 33.4%
Pleasley Hill – 36.3%		Devon - 38.1%
Ravensdale – 42.7%		

The report focuses on the four building blocks of the Nottinghamshire Child and Family Poverty Strategy, as they provide a powerful framework to illustrate the importance of services across a range of settings and organisations. The building blocks are as follows:

Family and Life Chances	Place and Delivery
Employment and Skills	Financial Support

Key Findings

- Service provision observed within Nottinghamshire's Child Poverty hotspot wards is generally good and practitioners and managers work hard to ensure the best possible outcomes for the people they work with.
- Of fundamental importance is the need to identify and target children and families that have the highest risk of falling into poverty. Services then can be developed and targeted to address the needs of these groups.
- In certain circumstances the review or improvement of performance management procedures would directly impact on the ability to target services in the future.
- Finally, a holistic approach to reducing child and family poverty is critical. There is a need to ensure a strong multi-agency approach at a local level to implement tangible initiatives and services to achieve common goals.

Family and Life Chances

Children's Centres

Children's centre provision for families with children under five performs a vitally important role in mitigating the effects of child and family poverty. The service directly aids child development during the foundation years whilst supporting adults to be successful parents and to achieve their own potential. The children's centres in focus provide a high level of service, identified through Ofsted reports and Nottinghamshire County Council performance data. An area for continued development in terms of child poverty is the support for encouraging parents back into employment. For example, centres consistently highlighted that volunteering at a centre significantly increased the confidence of parents and encouraged them to apply for work. There is also scope for developing Jobcentre Plus outreach, particularly in centres that currently do not have Jobcentre Plus involvement such as Ladybrook Children's Centre in Mansfield. Furthermore, the potential to take an active role in the recent creation of work clubs is an important opportunity. This could be achieved by offering meeting rooms for clubs and by encouraging parent specific meetings.

The second important conclusion to be drawn for Children's Centres is the need to improve engagement with the focus population and with specific key vulnerable groups. Performance data highlights that centre's experience below average levels of engagement when compared with others in the district. The use of Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) scores at Lower Super Output (LSOA) level will help to target engagement with vulnerable families. However, it would be useful to ensure the Relative Child Poverty measure is distributed to all centres at LSOA and ward level to provide an improved picture of where vulnerable families are located. The annual reporting cycle of the Child Poverty measure would also provide more frequent updates compared to the three year cycle for IDACI. This data must then be used to actively engage with specific groups to encourage participation. It would also be useful to ensure all children's centres have access to performance and outcome data relating to their reach and engagement of key 'at risk' groups, such as teenage parents and disabled parents.

Educational Attainment

Attainment within the focus wards and the relevant schools is generally poor and rates of permanent exclusions within hotspot wards also consistently exceed the County average. These correlate with the high levels of child poverty. However certain school inequality gaps based on Free School Meals were recorded as below

County averages. Smaller than average inequality gaps for schools that serve hotspot wards suggest that parental income does not necessarily predetermine inequalities in attainment and that school catchments areas reach wider than child poverty hot spot wards. Furthermore the existence of large fluctuations in achievement gaps between schools suggest that school management is crucial in helping to determine outcomes for pupils.

Head Teachers

Many head teachers expressed the notion that they and their staff do not feel confident addressing issues of child and family poverty. Whilst the primary concern of schools is educational attainment, helping to improve a child's well-being positively impacts upon achievement and so it is recommended that these findings be explored further. In the immediate future it is suggested that a child and family poverty resource be developed to better conceptualise poverty for schools and link poverty issues to existing services.

Raising the aspirations of children and receiving support to help achieve this was also a prominent theme to emerge. Raising aspiration is a crucial aspect of Nottinghamshire's Child and Family Poverty Strategy, and a pledge by Nottinghamshire County Council states: 'We will build the aspirations of children and families'. Therefore, support to schools based on this commitment is an important consideration.

Extended Services

The unique position that Extended Services occupy, means that they perform an invaluable role in reducing child and family poverty. The close working relationship that co-ordinators are expected to have with teachers allows them to identify children that require additional help to build a suite of activities to support these children and, critically, involve the parents whenever possible.

An important challenge is to avoid stigmatisation of free school meals (FSM) children and their families through identifying them for extra support. A combination of universal support and carefully targeted activities could serve to mitigate this problem.

The performance management of Extended Services should be explored further to enable them to improve evidence of their impact and to assist in planning future resource allocations. The nature of the funding arrangements will provide challenges to comprehensively implement a standardised performance model. However if co-ordinators and schools can contribute to and agree a process, then effective data collection becomes more likely.

Targeted Support and Youth Justice Service

Information from this service gives an indication as to where children and young people require more intensive support to deal with serious problems. Reduction of child and family poverty implies a much more preventative approach to improving the lives of children and their families. Therefore, if certain areas can be identified, such as Worksop South East, that have high numbers of children experiencing problems in their lives, then more proactive and preventative services can be better targeted, including children's centre provision, Extended Services and employability training.

These services have recently started collecting data at ward level, which will allow detailed mapping of localities that experience particular problems for children and young people.

Employment and Skills

Adult and Community Learning Service (ACLS)

Based on information from hot spot wards, the majority of funding is not spent on courses dedicated to employability skills due to current funding arrangements not being aligned for this purpose. Employability skills courses compliment the Personal and Community Development Fund (PCDL) and family learning courses to help create a more holistic learning pathway. The robust commissioning processes and the current provision of PCDL and family learning courses imply that ACLS are well placed to deliver courses around employability more extensively.

Furthermore, family learning has an important role in reducing child and family poverty. Therefore, partnership work with schools and related extended services coordinators is invaluable and should continue to be developed and improved. Currently no resident from any of the priority wards has attended a course run in partnership with extended services as defined within ACLS's attendance data. Although the Family Learning Impact Fund and wider Family Learning funding streams do require co-operation from head teachers and Extended Services, this does suggest that there is further collaboration to be established between Extended Services and ACLS.

ACLS also comments that it experiences occasional rigidity from head teachers that affects extended services co-operation and can prevent courses being delivered on school sites. An appreciation of the family context and the role ACLS plays is crucial to supporting cohesive families, building aspiration and ensuring a stepping stone into employment. ACLS involvement may also help to address concerns over aspiration in schools raised by head teachers¹ through welcoming parents into a learning environment and encouraging the involvement of their children.

Jobcentre Plus

The lack of capacity within the Jobcentre Plus national performance management team has prevented ward level analysis of performance. Importantly though, this type of analysis is possible through Jobcentre Plus's data management system.

As described, Jobcentre Plus collects important data on clients with children that allows provision to be tailored to suit the family context. Lone parents are a specific group that Jobcentre Plus focuses considerable effort on.

The distribution of information on clients (especially those with children) at ward level would serve as an important indicator for several services to best target provision. For example, worklessness can have many knock-on effects for households which may demand the involvement of other service areas.

The Family Works Initiative was established to engage with hard to reach families and support them into employment. The small caseloads and holistic nature of the work meant that advisors could target very vulnerable families. However, suggested outcomes do highlight the importance of establishing a visible connection with the communities that they serve and building productive and sustainable relationships with partner agencies. Holistic approaches rely on multi-agency co-operation, so to reduce child and family poverty, this must be effectively implemented. Projects like the Family Works Initiative should provide important learning (not just for Jobcentre Plus) regarding partnership approaches to solving long-standing problems within communities.

¹ Findings from the Child Poverty Workforce Development Survey, August 2011

Connexions

Connexions currently provides an important advice and guidance service to support 16-19 year olds into education, employment or training. Importantly any future agency will be required to allocate resources to meet need across the City and County. There is an indication that Gedling in particular, under the existing allocation, may not be receiving appropriate support as a district compared to others. Additionally, it would be useful to observe ward and school level analysis of young people 'Not in Education Training or Employment' (NEET) to allow an in depth picture of need.

Childcare Provision

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2011 provides a generally positive picture of provision across Nottinghamshire. Specific analysis below district level is not included in the assessment but the Family Information Service does provide an indication of availability. All wards are recorded as having at least six childcare providers within close proximity.

The common themes centre on the requirement to increase placement numbers as a proportion of the total child population. This is particularly relevant to Bassetlaw, because it was the only district to receive an amber rating based on placement numbers. Neither affordability nor quality were identified as underperforming in the assessment.

Foundation Learning

Information provided allows an observation on a service that provides courses that encourages young people into employment or education. The numbers are quite limited, especially from hotspot wards but it provides an example of preventative action that aims to raise aspirations, up-skill young people and improve employment prospects.

Financial Support

Financial Inclusion Taskforce

The analysis suggests a strong correlation between child and family poverty and financial exclusion. Each district records the most financially excluded ward and the ward with the highest demand for affordable credit as being a child and family poverty hotspot. Furthermore hotspot wards within the reports were consistently ranked within the top 10% based on financial exclusion and demand for credit.

The survey highlights that if residents are identified as being financially excluded, then the same area is highly likely to experience high demand for affordable credit. This creates a dilemma whereby residents that require affordable credit are precisely the residents that are most likely to be financially excluded, and so are least likely to receive affordable credit.

This places an emphasis on the provision offered by Citizens Advice Bureaux and Credit Unions. Supporting residents from hotspot wards to be financially responsible and providing affordable lines of credit and savings opportunities becomes crucial in reducing levels of financial exclusion and therefore reducing child and family poverty.

Citizen's Advice Bureau

Taking account of the caveat of recently reduced provision due to funding reductions, the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) provides vitally important support for those families most vulnerable to poverty. Most notably, this is through providing benefits support and guidance on debt and money management.

Provision for hotspots is generally good and engagement with vulnerable groups such as workless households, disabled clients and lone parents is encouraging. Work in Worksop South East in Bassetlaw and Boughton in Newark and Sherwood has been particularly effective in engaging residents, evidenced by high numbers of clients from vulnerable groups accessing the CAB compared to other wards.

It is also important to note that the CAB captures important data on client demographics and can sort data by ward which has allowed a useful analysis to be conducted. This data can aid the targeting of CAB engagement by, for example, identifying areas where few residents access their local CAB.

However, information on Kirkby East in Ashfield does suggest that residents in this ward are not being engaged with as much as they should be, considering the high numbers of benefits claimants, the high risk of financial exclusion and the high levels of child poverty. Furthermore, engagement in Cumberlands over debt management issues is also quite poor compared to the rest of the district.

Credit Unions

The most notable problem is the lack of coverage of Newark and Sherwood. Neither Nottingham Credit Union nor Two Shires Credit Union includes this district within their catchment area. This clear gap in provision needs to be addressed to ensure access to affordable credit and money management support.

The recent incorporation of Ashfield and Mansfield within Nottingham Credit Union's remit represents an important challenge in providing comprehensive and accessible provision. Currently Ashfield observes a low number of members compared to Gedling and Mansfield and it is suggested that engagement with residents, particularly from Kirkby East, be implemented to improve membership rates.

The link between poverty and financial support is again evidenced by the high numbers of clients in Worksop South East taking loans out with the Two Shires Credit Union. Furthermore the high number of households with dependants, in particular lone parents that access the Union highlights the importance of provision to families that are more likely to suffer from poverty.

Place and Delivery

Localism and Partnerships

The newly created Localism and Partnerships Team is well placed to champion the child and family poverty agenda within local communities, voluntary organisations and relevant partnerships. A holistic approach is vital to address poverty, so raising awareness and making clear links with service areas provides a basis for action.

District Councils

District councils all contribute to the child and family poverty agenda with examples of initiatives and good practice. Housing data was unavailable for this report² but it represents an area for future work as there are strong links between social housing tenancy and poverty.

The Killisick Improvement Team represents an example of collaborative working lead by Gedling District Council that attempts to holistically tackle problems in areas of high deprivation. The local experience and knowledge that district councils can

² Housing Data was not identified because of limited capacity by the researcher.

provide when co-ordinating efforts such as this means they are well placed to lead on initiatives to tackle child and family poverty at a local level. The identification of poverty hotspots may provide an initial focus for authorities.

Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and Joint Access Teams (JAT)

Ward level analysis highlights considerable variations in CAF initiations, for example Kirkby in Ashfield East and Worksop South East both display high numbers of active CAFs. These results could serve to focus the attention of services to best reflect the specific dynamics within an area.

This analysis also can expose whether there is potential for under-representation from certain areas based on active CAFs. If an area with high poverty levels, poor Index of Multiple Deprivation scores and low educational attainment, records much lower than average active CAFs, then it may suggest that children requiring help are going unnoticed. Furthermore, if this is cross referenced against organisations that are initiating CAFs, it may provide further insight into the engagement of services and the consistency of CAF initiations across JATs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Family and Life Chances

1. Children's centres could assign particular attention to the development of services that encourage and support economic sustainability for families:
 - a. Retention and continued development of Jobcentre Plus outreach
 - b. Engagement with the creation of work clubs and the use of children's centre sites to host clubs.
2. Improved engagement with the focus population by children's centres:
 - a. Distribution of the relative child poverty measure to all children's centres
 - b. Use IDACI and relative child poverty data to effectively target proactive engagement within the community
 - c. Proactive engagement and monitoring of groups with children at greatest risk of poverty, including teenage parents, disabled parents and single parents.
3. Child Poverty Reference Group to consider the production of a child and family poverty resource document to be distributed to schools and other settings e.g. youth and play services.
4. Children, Families and Cultural Services to establish a comprehensive approach to raising aspirations. An initial think tank session with attendance from children's centres, schools, youth services and social services to explore the issue and agree an action plan is suggested.
5. Child poverty activity should be included in the forthcoming 'Closing the Gap' strategy for education.
6. Schools could make the most of the forthcoming pupil premium which will be allocated based on levels of deprivation using free school meal (FSM) data. The Department for Education recommends that pupil premium budget (which will not be ring fenced) is allocated in each school to improve attainment of the poorest pupils.

7. It is advisable that schools and the Governor Unit identify a named champion governor in each school to support the school to fulfil its responsibilities to improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged children and young people.
8. Extended Services to ensure activities and support includes parental involvement at every possible opportunity to encourage sustainable family development.
9. Extended Services to explore a comprehensive performance management procedure to better evidence impact and allow a comparison of performance between families of schools.
10. The Child Poverty Reference Group could utilise ward level Targeted Support and Youth Justice Services data to better understand the distribution of young people that are falling into difficulties.

Employment and Skills

11. ACLS could expand the provision of employability skills courses to establish a holistic learning pathway.
12. Increased partnership work between schools and ACLS to effectively integrate family learning.
13. Jobcentre Plus could provide ward level data as part of the information sharing with the County Council and its partners.
14. Child Poverty Reference Group may perhaps identify key learning from holistic projects like the Family Works Initiative to establish collaborative ways to effectively tackle child and family poverty.
15. Children, Families and Cultural Services to commit to the recommendations within the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2011 by increasing childcare placement numbers especially in Bassetlaw.
16. Child Poverty Reference Group to maintain a 16-19 NEET focus and actively engage with agencies tasked with supporting young people into further education, employment or training.
17. Future agencies engaging with 16-19 year olds must review and target resources to ensure the most vulnerable young people are receiving adequate support.

Financial Support

18. The CAB and their commissioners could further explore and analyse CAB data to gain a better understanding of local need and plan accordingly.
19. Newark and Sherwood District must be appropriately served by a credit union either through the establishment of a new union or through the expansion of an existing credit union.
20. There should be better promotion of the changes within local credit unions which target at risk groups and localities.
21. Child Poverty Reference Group to further explore the links between financial exclusion and child and family poverty to establish the significance of providing financial support and guidance in reducing poverty.
22. A greater understanding of debt issues for families within Nottinghamshire would be beneficial to prevent debt and financial exclusion. Greater links with Experian could be developed to make use of their data.

Place and Delivery

23. Nottinghamshire County Council's Localism and Partnerships Team could champion the reduction of child and family poverty.
24. Children, Families and Cultural Services are advised to include a ward level analysis on active CAFs within reporting cycles to inform service delivery.
25. District councils could review the availability of housing data and homelessness, especially at ward level.
26. District council child poverty leads could use the child poverty agenda to share emerging practice and work together on particular initiatives.
27. District Councils could explore methods of coordinating support in specific areas of advantage, drawing upon examples of good practice such as the Killisick Improvement Team.

Suggested Next Steps

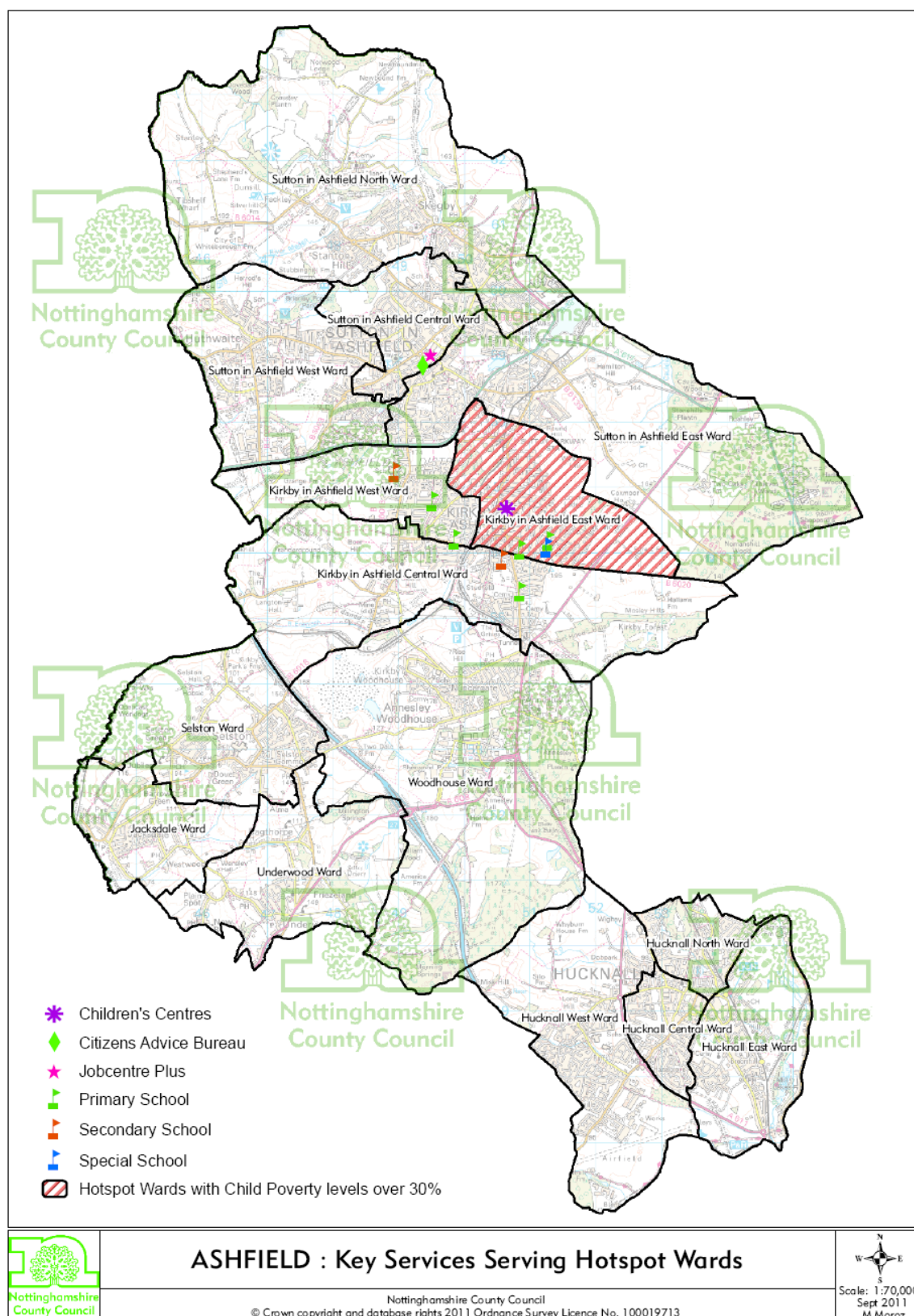
In addition to the recommendations already listed, the Child Poverty Reference Group is asked to also consider the following suggestions to aid improved data and research for child poverty hot spot wards:

28. The locations of key services within each target hot spot ward could be plotted onto LSOA child poverty maps to highlight their location in relation to target groups. Maps have been included in the appendix of this exec summary and the main report which contribute to this recommendation.
29. A more simplified version of this exercise could be completed for additional hot spot wards as defined by the 2009 child poverty data published on the 30th September 2011.
30. Nottinghamshire County Council and partners could target their resources and interventions to very specific areas and demographic groups using LSOA data as appropriate.
31. Assessing whether key target groups are accessing services and subsequently evaluating the effectiveness of the support should be a key driver for the performance of a number of services for example the numbers of disabled parents and teenage parents accessing Children Centres and the outcomes for them.
32. Key findings from this report could be shared with District Children and Family Partnership groups to enable them to adopt similar exercises, as well as being equipped with the knowledge of service gaps, good practice and awareness of which localities and groups to actively target.

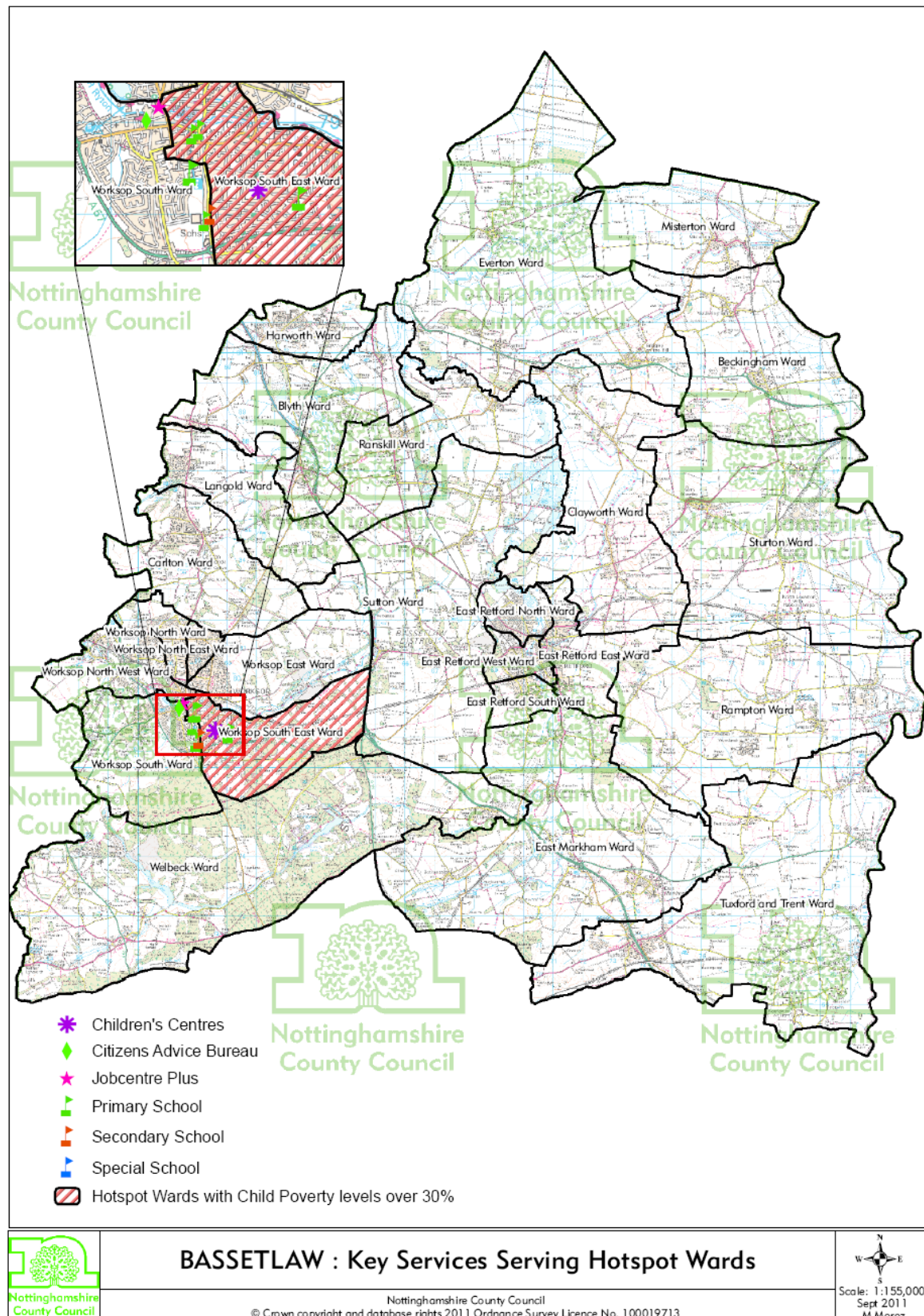
APPENDIX ONE

Key services serving Hot Spot Wards

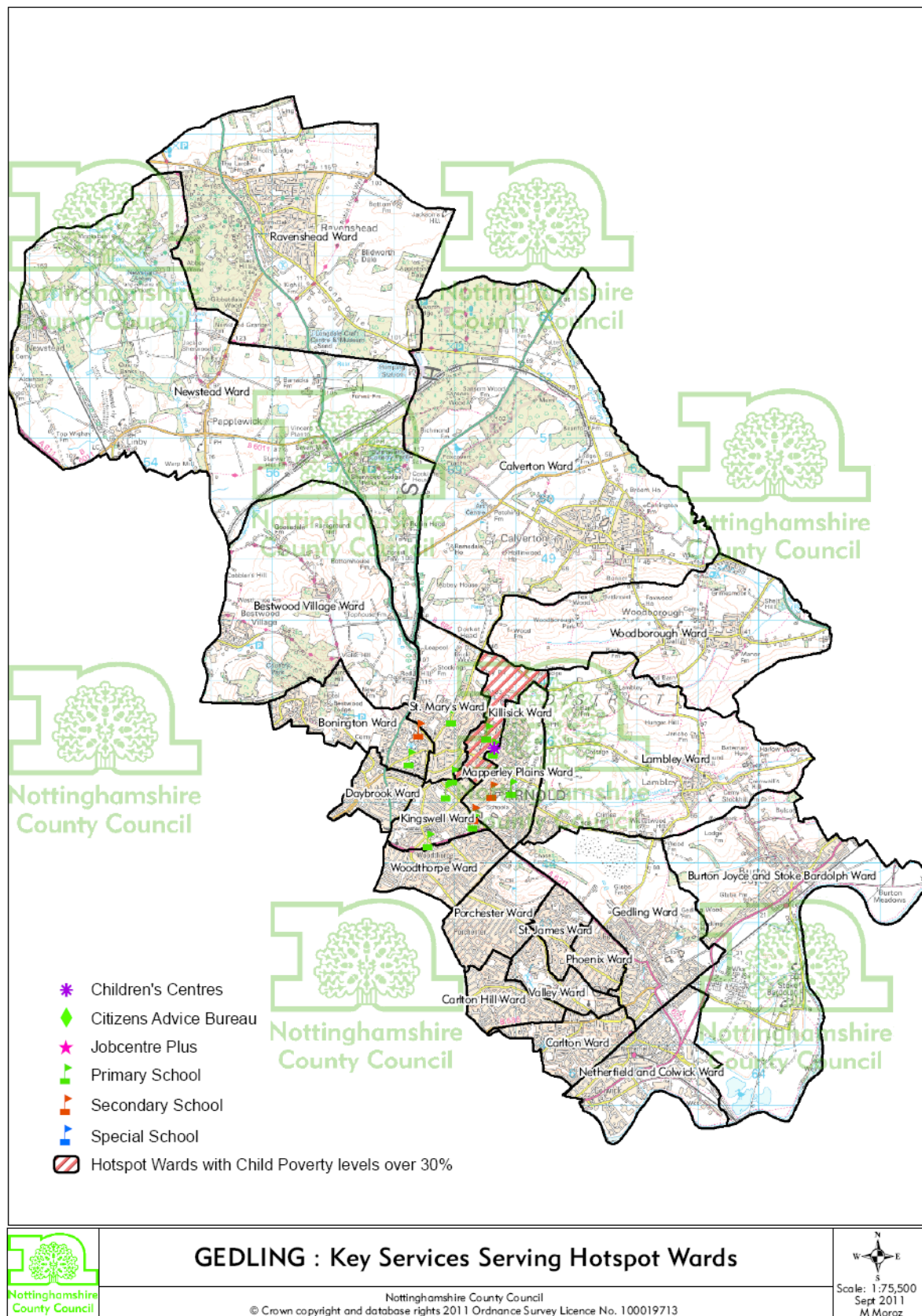
ASHFIELD



BASSETLAW



GEDLING

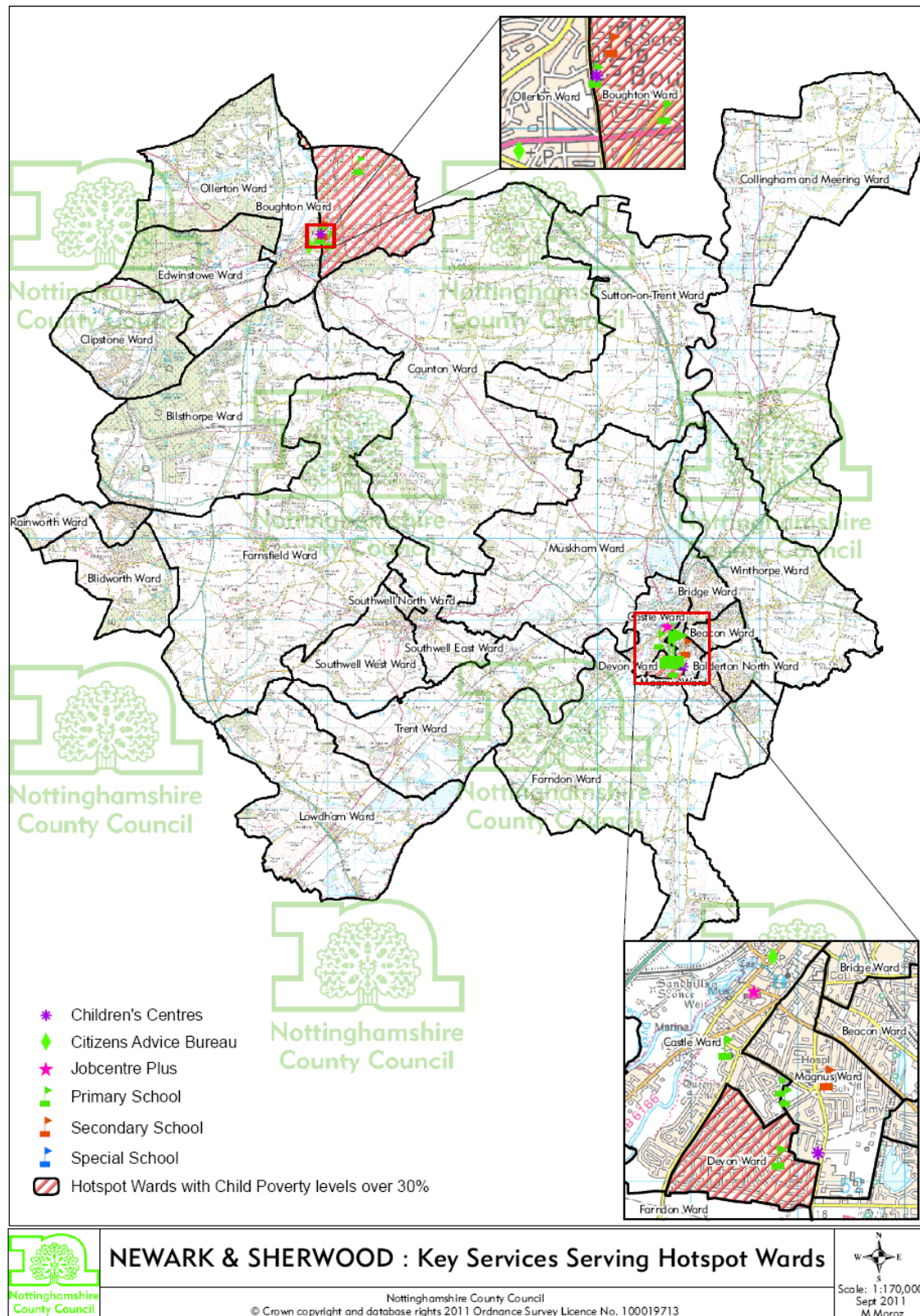


MANSFIELD : Key Services Serving Hotspot Wards

Nottinghamshire County Council

Scale: 1:55,000
Sept 2011

NEWARK AND SHERWOOD



DRAFT