

## **The impacts of the bedroom tax on children and their schools**

### **Stakeholder Event Summary – Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2014**

Researchers within the School of Environment, Education and Development at the University of Manchester have recently started working on a project which aims to explore the implications of the ongoing reforms to UK housing welfare, in particular the government's social housing size criteria policy (otherwise known as the bedroom tax), on children, children's services and schools in Manchester. The research is led by Professors Erica Burman and Ruth Lupton, and the team also includes Joanna Bragg, Dr Laura Cutts, Dr Anat Greenstein, Dr Terry Hanley, Afroditi Kalambouka, Lauren McCoy, Kate Sapin, and Dr Brian Webb. The project will involve conducting case studies and speaking to families affected by the bedroom tax in two locations in Manchester – Moss Side and Wythenshawe, as well as larger scale quantitative work across the whole city. Data collection and analysis will take place between April and November 2014, with findings reported both in academic journal articles and to communities and organisations involved following this.

On Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2014 we held a stakeholder event launching the research project. There was a fantastic turn out and 28 people attended the event, representing a wide range of services including housing associations, local campaign groups, research groups, schools, and local charities. At the event we had four informative presentations on various issues around the bedroom tax, from Matthew Jackson from the Centre for Local Economic Strategies, Honor Donnelly representing the anti-bedroom tax campaign and those affected by the bedroom tax, Steve License from Wythenshawe Community Housing, and Eileen Herden from the London School of Economics.

We also took some time to speak in small groups with participants about two key questions, which were: 'What impact has the bedroom tax had on children and their education, both where families have had to or chosen to move and where families have had to or chosen to stay?' and 'What impact has the bedroom tax had on children's services and schools, both where families have had to or chosen to move and where families have had to or chosen to stay?'. Below, we have briefly summarised what we heard from participants:

1. General thoughts:
  - a. The bedroom tax is part of other welfare reforms and cuts and its impacts are difficult to evaluate separately
  - b. There is a danger of a "ripple effect" on people not directly influenced by the bedroom tax, such as losing neighbours and friends or having to financially support family members affected by the tax and other welfare cuts
  - c. "Ripple effect – people who weren't affected are being affected in that those that have had to move into their areas"
  - d. Discretionary Housing Payments are "being used as an interim" and masking some of the issues. Furthermore, even where these are renewed, the insecurity of this measure and the short timeframe for payments generates extra stress for those impacted
  - e. "The councils are being affected by cut backs which is already having an impact on schools and services"
2. What impact has the bedroom tax had on children and their education, both where families have had to or chosen to move and where families have had to or chosen to stay?
  - a. Impacts on social and familial relations

- i. Isolation from other family members- losing rooms affects family visits where children cannot stay with relatives, or when parents have part custody
- ii. There is a risk of increased criminality and particularly increase in domestic violence
- iii. Less space for families to socialise when moving to smaller properties
- iv. Loss of connection to family home and memories
- v. Loss of support networks in the area (for both those who move and those who stay while their neighbours move)
- vi. Different impacts for younger and older children, younger children may have to share room which might impact their mental wellbeing; older children might be asked to move back into the family house to contribute; and there are potentially detrimental effects in neighbourhoods for example there may be issues between those affected and those who are not, particularly in relation to pensioners who are exempt from the policy.

b. Material and physical impacts

- i. The bedroom tax increases poverty. Families cut back on food and provide children with less healthy nutrition.
- ii. Families are cutting back on fuel and heating
- iii. Children may be required to travel longer distances to educational and social activities, with increased costs
- iv. Reduced access to amenities
- v. Problems for financial management: Families may turn to pay day loans and get high interest credit

c. Educational impacts

- i. Nutritional changes (such as buying processed foods with high sugar levels) and hunger affect concentration and learner ability
- ii. As part of cutting back some families cut down on communication and internet bills. This affects children's access to school work and their ability to complete assignments.
- iii. Potential longer term impacts on children's confidence and ability to engage in education
- iv. Pressures on school places where families have moved
- v. Moving schools might increase the chance of bullying
- vi. Greater distance from school may lead to lateness or drop in attendance

d. Emotional impacts

- i. Instability may lead to stress and vulnerability
- ii. A general undermining of self-confidence and self-esteem, potentially due to the discourse about 'entitlement'
- iii. Issues around 'psychological homelessness' and a sense of not belonging

3. What impact has the bedroom tax had on children's services and schools, both where families have had to or chosen to move and where families have had to or chosen to stay?

a. Impacts on schools:

- i. Administrative issues for schools, tracking pupil mobility

- ii. Where students have special educational and additional needs it takes time and a lot of extra work to co-ordinate and put in place the package of support they need, so there may be issues around this where children are having to move schools
- iii. Issues around students who have special educational and additional needs
- iv. Additional teaching and support required, therefore more pressure placed on front line staff in services and schools
- v. Hunger is an issue for children – impact on schools for services such as breakfast clubs and the number of children requiring free school meals
- vi. Issues connected to the use of pupil premium. For example, this is only available once children are in primary school and not beforehand. Furthermore, whilst this may be useful it is inflexible and tied up with unhelpful monitoring systems
- vii. Schools and services are picking up on wider issues as other services are cut, however there are difficulties around this for example not having a clear coordinate overview of the issues and services.

b. Impacts for other services

- i. “Making social housing a sector of need and not choice”
- ii. Increasing reliance on the third sector, which is also under significant pressure to provide services
- iii. General impact on health service, perhaps increasing referrals due to mental health problems or stress
- iv. Issues such as domestic violence increasing, requiring response from all services
- v. Services such as housing associations are under pressure to provide additional services, having to take on extra staff to provide services around money and debt advice. Also front line staff are dealing with complex emotional issues and are therefore put under more stress at work
- vi. Moving might mean people don't have access to services

**Going forward...**

We are now planning to go on with the research, which will include in-depth focus of two case studies (Wythenshawe and Moss Side) – interviewing families, schools and services; as well as using statistics to try and situate these particular areas in relation to the wider impacts on Greater Manchester. The stakeholder day has enabled us to build connections and start exploring further cooperation with community researchers and local activists, so we can try and make our research process and findings useful to the communities affected by the bedroom tax.

Some of you were worried that this project would not add anything new to what is already known in the area. We plan to focus on the impacts on children and education, an issue that is not currently addressed by research. Further, we are planning to link with an existing network of researchers working on housing welfare reform which is conducting research in the south of England, to share findings and work together, and provide services and organisations with an accurate and detailed analysis of the impacts.

The stakeholder day informed us about new issues and allowed key people in the field to meet up. Following some of your comments and insights we are now going to talk to some people and organisations we did not think about before. For example, following comments about criminality and

domestic violence we have decided to include in our research plan interviews with the police and third sector organisations such as rape crisis and specific domestic violence organisations.

**Further information:**

We have launched a website for the project, in which you can find reports and information on the projects, as well as links to other documents and websites.

**Website address:** <http://www.seed.manchester.ac.uk/research/seedresearch/poverty-and-social-justice/bedroom-tax/>

There is also a **Twitter feed** for the project: #UOMbedroomtax

**To contact us:** you are welcome to contact any member of the research team, contact details are available via the individual research profiles on the website, otherwise email: [Joanna.bragg@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Joanna.bragg@manchester.ac.uk)