

Notes from visit to Watergate School:

Members of the Committee had a discussion with a group of parents, carers, school staff and pupils. The following comments were made during the discussion:

- Many families with disabled children or who have disabilities themselves have power intensive equipment that needs to be left on all the time meaning much higher than average electricity use.
- Many families need their homes to be constantly warm for their children due to their disabilities. Other specific issues include families being unable to insulate floors by having rugs or carpets due to wheelchair access requirements.
- Families were experiencing shortages of essential items in pharmacies. For example, families reported it had become very difficult to get “Dioralyte” meaning they could no longer get it on prescription and had to either attempt to buy it online at inflated prices or had been given recipes to make homemade versions. This caused increased costs and other impacts had also been seen by teachers who were increasingly seeing the impact on children.
- There were challenges getting GP appointments causing additional visits to A and E.
- Watergate School give out Food Bank vouchers, however foodbank supplies is reducing, whilst this helps families in the interim it is not a sustainable long-term solution. Many families with children with disabilities needed specialised diets or specific items which would be unlikely to be available in Food Banks.
- The dramatic increases in food prices was very challenging for families and staff.
- Poor housing conditions including living with damp was a challenge faced by some families.
- Some families had experienced cuts to their children’s transport which was having a big financial and logistical impact for the families concerned.
- Housing problems were raised by a number of parents and challenges in being able to speak to staff at the Council or at Lewisham Homes to get help.
- Issues such as antisocial behaviour could be more of a challenge for vulnerable families. For example if they are mostly at home as unable to travel due to disabilities and more sensitive to noise then living with antisocial neighbours could become really challenging and cause high levels of anxiety.
- A parent mentioned that they feared crime and ASB would rise as parents worked more hours to provide for their family meaning children had more time on their own. Many families also had less money available for activities for their children.
- There were families in the school where the child was housed in Hospital as the family had not been housed somewhere suitable for the child’s needs. This was deeply distressing for the family(s) concerned.
- Some families were being housed in temporary accommodation such as hostels that was very distressing for the children particularly for example when they have ASD or anxiety and require access to a safe outside space. Some of the hostels where families were placed needed security guards.
- Families in the PRS were feeling increasingly precarious and nervous about if they have to be moved. They were nervous about complaining about maintenance issues or damp in case they were threatened with eviction.
- Special schools such as Watergate had high ratios of TAs and support staff due to the high needs of the children. Many of these staff were on low wages and the pressure on their

household budgets was intense. The school was looking at some measures it could introduce such a communal food cupboards.

- A member of staff mentioned once in financial difficulty it was very challenging to get out. A delay to her pay had meant that she suddenly had additional non-payment charges which has pushed her further into debt.
- Transport (to school for children) and housing emerged repeatedly as key areas of concern for parents.