

SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE		
Title	Lewisham Poverty Commission Update	
Key Decision	No	Item No. 4
Ward	all	
Contributors	Executive Director for Resources and Regeneration	
Class	Part 1	Date: 12 July 2017

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The Council's Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee conducted a review into poverty in borough, as some areas in Lewisham are among the most deprived in the country according to the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation¹. One of the things noted by the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee was that poverty is a complex problem and there are difficulties in identifying the right course of action to take to tackle this problem effectively. In addition, policies that aim to tackle poverty or alleviate its outcomes need to reach the right people to be effective. Safer Stronger felt that poverty should receive greater focus in the Council.
- 1.1 As a result of the review into poverty, Mayor and Cabinet agreed at their 7 September meeting to appoint the Cabinet Member of Policy and Performance as the lead cabinet member responsible for overseeing the Council's actions to tackle poverty. Mayor and Cabinet also agreed that a Lewisham Poverty 'Taskforce' be convened to develop a comprehensive Poverty Strategy.
- 1.2 The Lewisham Poverty Commission was formed in February and has held two meetings so far. This report provide the Committee with an update on the Commission's work, as requested at its 27 November meeting.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:
- Note the content of the report
 - Note the invitation to members of the Committee to attend the Lewisham Poverty Summit on Wed 12 July

3 Policy context

- 3.1 Lewisham's Sustainable Communities Strategy (2008-2020) sets out a vision of a resilient, healthy and prosperous borough. The Strategy informs the direction of Council policy and it guides the process of decision making. One of the governing principles of the Strategy is the ambition to 'reduce inequality and narrow the gap in outcomes for citizens'. It is recognised in the Strategy that '...deprivation and poverty

¹ The English Index of Deprivation 2015 published by the Office of National Statistics, which combine information from a range of official administrative sources and census data in to develop a coordinated picture of deprivation across the whole country.

can limit people's prospects (and) some of our communities are more likely to experience their effects than others'.

3.2 In addition, the Council has a number of corporate priorities, two of which are particularly relevant to the commission's work: 1) Community leadership and 5) Strengthening the local economy.

3.3 The Commission's aim is to provide recommendations to the Council that aim to alleviate poverty, mitigate against its negative effects and strengthen people's resilience. The Commission will therefore contribute to the aims of Lewisham's Sustainable Communities Strategy and to two of the Council's corporate priorities as outlined above.

4 Lewisham Poverty Commission

4.1 The Commission

The Commission will build on the work done by the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee with its review into poverty. The commission has been set up to combine expertise about poverty with expertise about the local area. Its members are:

- Councillor Joe Dromey (Chair), Cabinet Member for Policy and Performance
- Alice Woudhuysen, Child Poverty Action Group
- Bharat Mehta, Trust for London
- Bill Davies, Head of Policy, Central London Forward
- Claire Mansfield, New Local Government Network
- Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Gloria Wyse, Lewisham Citizens
- Dr Simon Griffiths, Senior Lecturer in Politics, Goldsmiths
- Councillor Brenda Dacres, Lewisham Council
- Councillor Colin Elliot, Lewisham Council
- Councillor James J-Walsh, Lewisham Council
- Councillor Joan Millbank, Cabinet Member for Third Sector and Community
- Councillor Joyce Jacca, Lewisham Council

4.2 Scope of the Commission's work

The commission has been set up to draft recommendations that aim to alleviate poverty, mitigate against its negative effects and strengthen people's resilience. At its first meeting, the Commission discussed the need to be targeted in its approach to the issue, as poverty is such a broad concept. The Commission was also aware of the limited time available to them. As a result, the Commission agreed to focus on policy areas and recommendations that could have a genuine impact for people living in poverty in Lewisham. The Commission wants to end up making recommendations that are ambitious, yet achievable. However, it also recognised that some of the policies with the most impact are decided on a national or regional level. The Commission may therefore also make recommendations for changes the Council can lobby other organisations for.

5. The Commission's areas of focus

5.1 Employment, skills and anchor institutions

The main route out of poverty is getting people in jobs, and particularly into well-paid, secure jobs. Employment and skills are therefore an area of focus for the Commission.

Lewisham residents have access to one of the biggest labour markets in the world and the borough is a significant exporter of labour, with a large majority of residents (60%) travelling out of the borough for work.

However, not all of our residents are well-equipped to navigate the London labour market and some struggle to find decent work. London's 'hourglass economy' continues to hollow out, with an increasing concentration of jobs both at the very high end of the skills spectrum (Level 4 and above) and at the extreme lower end (low-skilled jobs requiring no qualifications). In Lewisham, 17.7% of working age residents have no qualifications and a substantial proportion (34.4%) have qualifications at Levels 1, 2 or 3.² The growth areas of the labour market are not at these intermediate levels and the challenge for the borough is how to equip its residents with the necessary skills to access secure employment.

The majority of residents that do work in the borough, are employed by one of its public sector organisations. Lewisham's public sector institutions make significant contributions to the local economy through the money they spend procuring goods and services, the number of local people they employ and their ownership of public assets. The Council's partners are therefore key to have an impact on the local economy.

There are a number of things the Council and its partners are already doing in this, for example the Council's support for the London Living Wage as well as some of our partners and also the Council's joint work with Lambeth and Southwark on employment support. The Lewisham Poverty Commission is looking at how this work can be improved upon.

5.2 *Housing*

The cost of housing has a significant impact on the percentage of people living in relative poverty in London³. Although house prices in the borough are currently lower than the London average, the median house price is still 14 times greater than the median income in the borough and rents are rising fast. Affordability is an issue across all types of tenure. The provision of genuinely affordable housing is therefore important in alleviating poverty, and so is a well-functioning housing market across all tenures. The Commission has therefore decided to look at housing as its second area of focus.

The Commission has noted that it was unrealistic to expect the Council alone to build enough houses to solve the crisis in availability and prices of housing. There is also the realisation that many people that struggle with housing costs live in the private rented sector. The Commission is therefore looking at ways to have an impact on the private rental market.

5.3 *Child poverty, child care costs and lone parent unemployment*

Lewisham is among the 20 local authorities with the highest levels of child poverty in the UK. Children in lone parent households are more likely to grow up in poverty⁴. Lewisham also has high numbers of lone parent households: according to the 2011 Census, 11% of households in the borough are lone parent households, compared to an average of 8.5% in inner London. The overwhelming majority (91.5%) of lone parent households in Lewisham are headed by women.

² For details of what different qualification levels mean, see <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels>.

³ Trust for London London's Poverty Profile 2015: <http://tinyurl.com/jkoqn2h>

⁴ <http://www.jrf.org.uk/data/child-poverty-rate-family-type-and-parent-work-status>

The Commission is looking at ways to improve the affordability but also accessibility of child care. For many parents, the hours of care available can be difficult to combine with work. The Commission is therefore also looking at ways to encourage opportunities for flexible working.

6 Engagement with residents, partners and stakeholders

6.1 The Commission is keenly aware of how important it is to include the Council's partners but particularly our residents in their work.

The voices and experiences of those who are or were experiencing poverty are particularly important to the Commission. They realise that people themselves will (often) know best what would help them, but engaging people can be challenging. The approach taken is to allow people to comment and feed and to listen to them. These interactions can inadvertently make people feel patronised, so the approach is to be mindful of this and try to avoid it.

The commission is also aware that the Council can't tackle poverty alone, particularly given the cuts in funding the Council has experienced in recent years, so it wants to engage with partner organisations. The Commission wants to look at how the Council can work closely with partners and communities in new and innovative ways, so feels it is important to engage with partners and stakeholders.

All Lewisham Councillors have also been informed about the project and approached to provide comments. The Commission realises that local Councillors have a wealth of knowledge about their local area and their residents, so are seen as important partners.

Part of the work of the Commission is therefore to engage with our residents, and with the Council's partners and wider stakeholders. There are a number of activities that have happened or are happening to allow people to feed into the Commission's work.

6.2 *Lived experience paper*

The Commission also considered a paper on the experience of life in Lewisham for people on low incomes (see attached). This paper provided some qualitative material to complement the quantitative, policy-focused picture in the other background papers. The material was gathered from conversations and informal interviews with Lewisham residents, who were approached via a number of voluntary and community organisations in the borough.

Much of the material was gathered from people who are 'getting by', rather than those destitute or in crisis, and the paper shows some of what enables residents to 'stand on their own two feet', to borrow one resident's words. Conversations with residents highlighted the precariousness of life for many in the borough (the fact that everyone is 'only a pay check away from poverty', as one put it), the importance of access to advice and support networks, and the value of a sense of place and community. In their discussion of the paper, Commissioners noted the high levels of physical and mental health problems in Lewisham and the associated barriers to employment and social participation. However, they also recognised the importance of building on residents' existing skills, interests and desire to contribute to their communities.

6.3 *Website and online call for evidence*

The poverty commission webpage is www.lewisham.gov.uk/povertycommission. It contains information about the Commission's work including papers for its meetings as well as a call for evidence. The page also contains a short survey where people as well as organisations can submit their views, experiences and suggestions for change.

The webpage also allows one to send an email if they'd rather not fill in the survey. The questions asked in the survey are:

- What makes it difficult to make ends meet in Lewisham?
- What can you and your community do to help make it easier to get by?
- What can the Council and its partners do to help?
- Is there anything else you would like the Commission to know about?

The webpage and survey will be promoted via the Council's social media accounts and included in the Lewisham Life email. The Lewisham Life email currently reaches 35,000 residents and businesses.

6.4 *Local Assemblies*

All Councillors have been invited to add an item on the Lewisham Poverty Commission to the agenda for their assemblies in this period. These sessions will allow the assemblies to discuss the work of the Commission and poverty in the borough more widely. A toolkit for the session has been developed and sent round to Councillors.

At the time of writing, Crofton Park and Grove Park assembly meetings have conducted these discussions. A further 4 assemblies have been confirmed, but had not taken place yet at the time of writing. Some more are likely to follow.

6.5 *Visits*

Following the visits to drop-in centres for the lived experience paper, visits have also been arranged for Commissioners. The organisations visited have been our housing options centre, the provider of employment support for the Pathways to Employment programme and one is being organised for a Children's Centre.

Members of the Commission have also attend a session of the Young Advisors to hear about their experiences and thoughts. This has led to a thought provoking discussion of the benefits and disadvantages of both apprenticeships and university degrees, amongst other comments.

6.6 *London Boroughs*

A letter has been sent to all London Boroughs as a "Call for Solutions". All boroughs were told about the poverty commission's work and its areas of focus. All boroughs were asked if they could share examples of innovative solutions they have implemented in each of the areas of focus of the Commission, as well as any other examples of good work to combat poverty or its effects. Those Councils that had previously or were in the course of organising their own Commissions on fairness, equality or poverty were also specifically asked about their experiences and any lessons they had learnt. The responses were incorporated in some of the papers presented to the Commission at their last meeting.

6.7 *The Lewisham Poverty Summit*

The Lewisham Poverty Summit is taking place on Wednesday 12th July. The Summit will be an opportunity to discuss the Commission's work with the Council's partners and stakeholders. A wide range of partners from the public, voluntary and community sector have been invited to attend.

All Councillors have been invited to the Lewisham Poverty Summit. All Members of this

Committee are warmly invited to attend, and discuss the work of the Commission in more depth, speak to Commissioners directly and provide feedback on the Commission's emerging ideas.

5 Financial implications

There are no financial implications following this report.

The Lewisham Poverty Commission is focused on improving and coordinating existing work by the Council and its partners as opposed to recommendations that would require additional financial resources.

6 Legal implications

There are no legal implications following this report.

7 Equalities implications

There are no equalities implications following this report.

Background documents and originator

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