

COUNCIL			
Title	Working together to tackle poverty in Lewisham – Final report of the Lewisham Poverty Commission		
Key Decision	No		Item No.
Ward	all		
Contributors	Executive Director for Resources and Regeneration		
Class	Part 1	Date: 22 November 2017	

1. Purpose

- 1.1 Mayor and Cabinet agreed on 7 September 2017, following a recommendation by the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee, to establish a Commission to review poverty in borough and develop recommendations to tackle poverty.
- 1.1 The Lewisham Poverty Commission was since established and held its first meeting in February 2017. Attached is the Commission’s final report “Working together to tackle poverty in Lewisham”. The report contains recommendations to Lewisham Council, other public sector bodies in the borough, partners in the borough’s voluntary and community sector and national government.
- 1.2 This report will have been presented to Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee on 2 November and Mayor and Cabinet on 15 November. The report to Mayor and Cabinet provides an outline of the scope of Lewisham Poverty Commission, its focus for preparing recommendations and the process that was followed to come to these recommendations. The report to Mayor and Cabinet contains recommendations for Mayor and Cabinet to respond to the Commission’s report.
- 1.3 Below follows the text of that Mayor and Cabinet report. The Council will be provided with a verbal update at the meeting on the response by Mayor and Cabinet. The Council is recommended to note the “Working together to tackle poverty in Lewisham” report.

2. Recommendations to the Council

- 2.1 The Council is recommended to:
- Welcome the challenge and insight provided by the Lewisham Poverty Commission and thank the Commissioners for their time and expertise
 - Note the final report of the Lewisham Poverty Commission and its recommendations
 - Note the report to Mayor and Cabinet presenting the final report of the Lewisham Poverty Commission
 - Receive a verbal update on decisions made at Mayor and Cabinet on 15 November.

3 Recommendations to the Mayor

3.1 The Mayor is recommended to:

- Welcome the challenge and insight provided by the Lewisham Poverty Commission and thank the Commissioners for their time and expertise
- Note the final report of the Lewisham Poverty Commission and its recommendations
- asks officers to develop a detailed response to the report's findings and recommendations including an action plan
- retain a Cabinet Member with responsibility for overseeing Lewisham Council's actions to tackle poverty, including presenting a yearly report to the Council's scrutiny and executive functions so progress can be tracked.

4 Policy context

- 4.1 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 can limit people's prospects (and) some of our communities are more likely to experience their effects than others'.
- 4.2 In addition, the Council has a number of corporate priorities, three of which are particularly relevant to the commission's work: Community leadership, Decent Homes for All and Strengthening the local economy. The Commission has made recommendations for action in each of these areas.
- 4.3 The final report of the Lewisham Poverty Commission makes recommendations to Lewisham Council and its partners on how poverty can be alleviated, how its negative effects can be mitigated against and how people's resilience can be strengthened. The Commission recommendations therefore contribute to the aims of Lewisham's Sustainable Communities Strategy and to the three corporate priorities of the Council as outlined above.

5 Lewisham Poverty Commission

The Commission

- 5.1 The Lewisham Poverty Commission was set up to combine expertise about poverty with expertise about the local area. Its members were:
- 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
 - Councillor Joe Dromey (*Chair*), Cabinet Member for Policy and Performance
 - 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

Scope of the Commission's work

- 5.2 Poverty is complex and multidimensional. The Commission has used the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's definition, where poverty is a situation in which 'a person's resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation)'.¹ In this definition, 'needs' encompass both basic material goods and the ability to participate in social life. The term 'resources' refers to the financial and in-kind means necessary to meet these needs. In-kind resources may be formal goods and services (those provided by a local authority, for example) or informal goods and services (accessed via social networks or community organisations, for example).
- 5.3 The Commission was 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 has also been 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.
- 5.4 Many of the Commission's recommendations have been directed at Lewisham Council. The Commission has recognised that local authorities have a significant impact on the lives of their residents through the many services they provide, commission and facilitate. The Commission has also recognised the good work Lewisham Council has been doing for many years to tackle poverty and support its residents who are dealing with the consequences. However a local authority by itself can only do so much, particularly given the government's decision to cut two third of Lewisham Council's funding since 2010; cuts which are set to continue. In this context, the Commission has worked to create recommendations to the Council that are ambitious but realistic.
- 5.5 The Commission has been keenly aware that local authorities also have a significant role to play in their local area by bringing local partners together to tackle pressing issues. The borough contains many significant publicly funded institutions aside from the Council including a world class university, social housing providers, a large further education college as well as a large NHS trust. All provide important services for the citizens of Lewisham including education, housing and care. These organisations also make up a significant proportion of local employment and are significant sources of investment in the local area. The Commission's final report therefore sets out ambitious actions for Lewisham Council with its local partners to take to make a real difference to the lives of local people.
- 5.6 Finally, some of the barriers faced by the poorest Lewisham residents could only be removed through changes in policy by national government. The Commission has therefore also called on national government to play their part: to support people that desperately need it and to create the conditions that enable individuals, local communities and local organisations to solve poverty.

6 The Commission's areas of focus

¹ See <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/definition-poverty>.

Supporting residents to access well-paid, secure jobs inside and outside of Lewisham

- 6.1 The main and sustainable route out of poverty is getting people into well-paid and secure jobs. Lewisham is situated on the doorstep of London, a growing and thriving city, and three in five residents work outside of the borough. While the London employment market is easy for residents to access, the growth in jobs has been at the high and low end of the labour market, with comparatively few jobs in-between. There has also been a growth in insecure employment. Given this, and the Government's cuts to funding for training, it can be difficult for residents in low-paid and insecure jobs to progress to higher-paid and secure work. Lewisham's local economy is comparatively small, with the lowest number of jobs per capita of any London borough and a high proportion of jobs in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs).
- 6.2 Supporting, growing and attracting businesses in Lewisham will be important to increase job opportunities for Lewisham residents. In the absence of large private employers, Lewisham's public sector institutions play an important role not just as providers of public services, but as major employers too. These partners working together to increase employment opportunities for Lewisham residents and opportunities to develop their skills so residents can advantage of the local and London-wide labour market have therefore been an area of focus for the Commission.

Tackling child poverty by supporting parents into decent work

- 6.3 Lewisham is among the 20 local authorities with the highest levels of child poverty in the UK. Child poverty has a direct impact on the life chances of young people, limiting their ability to achieve their potential. Children in lone parent households are more likely to grow up in poverty as lone parents often struggle to find flexible and high quality employment that fits around childcare.
- 6.4 The Commission has recommended ways to improve the availability of flexible and high-quality job opportunities in the borough and opportunities for parents to develop their skills, ways to improve the affordability but also accessibility of child care and finally, access to advice about entitlements to child care as well as general advice about benefits.

Improving the local housing market

- 6.5 The cost of housing is an important factor in London's and Lewisham's higher poverty rate. Over one in four Londoners live in poverty after housing costs are taken into account, compared with one in five nationally. House prices in Lewisham are lower than the London average, but they have risen sharply, and the median house price is 14 times greater than the median income. Given high housing costs and a shortage of social homes, more residents are living in the private rented sector. Rents are rising fast, and many residents are subject to rogue landlords and insecurity.
- 6.6 The Commission has made recommendations about ways the Council can enhance its housebuilding programme, influence the private rented sector to improve conditions for residents, and work to prevent homelessness. Finally, the Commission has looked at changes to national policies that would increase the Council's ability to invest in social housing and help prevent residents going into rent arrears.

7 Engagement with residents, partners and stakeholders

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

their final report following several months of research and public consultation. The process involved a qualitative study of the lived experience of poverty in Lewisham; analysis of quantitative data and existing literature on poverty; discussions at local assemblies across the borough; an online consultation; a summit which brought together communities and wider stakeholder representatives from across the borough.

- 7.2 The Commission has held four meetings during the course of its work. At the first meeting on 28 February 2017, the Commission discussed its scope and focus. The Commission was also presented with data about Lewisham's population and the nature of poverty in the borough. The second meeting on 4 May provided the Commission with a paper on the experience of life in Lewisham for people on low incomes as well as information on the Council's work in their areas of focus, as well as examples of positive work done elsewhere. The third meeting was the Lewisham Poverty Summit on 12 July, to discuss the Commission's thinking with partners, stakeholders and residents, and get feedback. At their final meeting on 28 September, the Commission has agreed its final report and recommendations.
- 7.3 The voices and experiences of those who are or were experiencing poverty are particularly important to the Commission. People themselves will (often) know best what would help them, but engaging people can be challenging. The approach taken was to allow people to comment and provide their ideas while genuinely listening to them.
- 7.4 All Lewisham Councillors have also been informed about the project as it progressed and approached to provide comments. The Commission was aware that local Councillors have a wealth of knowledge about their local area and their residents, so are seen as important partners.

Lived experience paper

- 7.5 The Commission has considered a paper on the experience of life in Lewisham for people on low incomes. The 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.
- 7.6 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.

Website and online call for evidence

- 7.7 The Commission has a webpage at 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 contained a short survey where people as well as organisations could submit their views, experiences and suggestions for change. The questions asked in the survey were:
- 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?

7.8 The webpage and survey have been promoted via the Council's social media accounts and were included in the Lewisham Life email several times.

Local Assemblies

7.9 All Councillors were invited to add an item on the Lewisham Poverty Commission to the agenda for their assemblies in this period. These sessions have allowed the assemblies to discuss the work of the Commission and poverty in the borough generally. A toolkit for the discussion session was developed in advance and provided to all Councillors. Six of the borough's local assemblies have taken up this opportunity: Crofton Park, Grove Park, New Cross, Blackheath, Catford South and Evelyn.

Visits

7.10 A number of visits to drop-in centres have been arranged to hear about residents experiences and thoughts, both for officers working on the project and for Commissioners. The organisations or projects visited have been the Council's housing options centre, two of the borough's Children's Centres, the provider of employment support for the Pathways to Employment programme, a community library, the Whitefoot and Downham Community Food Project, a employment support programme by a local housing provider, Lewisham Credit Union, a local church and a session of the Council's Young Advisors meeting.

London Boroughs

7.11 All London Boroughs were written to, so they were aware of the Commission's work and so they could share examples of good work in their areas. Those Councils that had experience of organising their own Commissions on fairness, equality or poverty were also specifically asked to share lessons they had learnt. The responses were incorporated in some of the papers presented to the Commission at their last meeting.

The Lewisham Poverty Summit

7.12 The Lewisham Poverty Summit took place on Wednesday 12th July. The Summit was an opportunity to discuss the Commission's work with the Council's partners and stakeholders. More than 70 people attended, including representatives from partner organisations, the voluntary and community sector, faiths organisations and residents.

8 The Council's response

8.1 The Lewisham Poverty Commission has functioned as an advisory body to the Council. Its membership has combined expertise about poverty with expertise about the local area. Following the extensive consultation processes described in section 7, it has now made recommendations to Lewisham Council in each of the policy areas described in section 6. The Commission has worked to make recommendations that are realistic but ambitious, and fit the specific circumstances of poverty in the London Borough of Lewisham.

8.2 The Mayor is now asked to note the "Working together to tackle poverty in Lewisham" report and ask officers to develop a detailed response to its recommendations for Lewisham Council. This response should include an action plan.

- 8.3 The Commission is aware that tackling poverty will not happen overnight. The Commission has therefore requested that a Cabinet Member retains specific responsibility for overseeing Lewisham Council's actions to tackle poverty, and recommends that this Cabinet Member present a yearly report to the Council's scrutiny and executive functions, so progress can be tracked.
- 8.4 Finally, the Mayor is asked to thank the members of the Commission for their time and expertise, and the insight they have provided to the Council.

9 Financial implications

- 9.1 There are no financial implications following from this report.
- 9.2 The Lewisham Poverty Commission has been focused on improving and coordinating existing work by the Council and its partners as opposed to recommendations that would require additional financial resources.
- 9.3 Financial implications may arise when it comes to the implementation of the recommendations in the Working together to tackle poverty in Lewisham – Final report of the Lewisham Poverty Commission. However, any decision to spend money would then be subject to the Council's formal decision-making.

10 Legal implications

- 10.1 There are no legal implications following from this report.
- 10.1 Legal implications may arise when it comes to the implementation of the recommendations in the Working together to tackle poverty in Lewisham – Final report of the Lewisham Poverty Commission. However, this would be then be subject to the Council's formal decision-making.

11 Equalities implications

- 11.1 The Commission has worked to challenge some of the systemic inequalities existing in the borough. Its recommendations are aimed at tackling poverty and preventing the negative impacts it has on people's lives, such as lower educational attainment, a persistence of intergenerational poverty, and poor physical and mental health outcomes.
- 11.2 The Commission has made every effort in its work to draw views and ideas from across the community, but particularly from those residents living in poverty in Lewisham. The process of engagement followed by the Commission is described in section 7 of this report.
- 11.3 Any decisions that arise from the implementation of the recommendations in the Commission's "Working together to tackle poverty in Lewisham" report will be subject to the Council's formal decision-making and an assessment of the equalities implications of those decisions will be made then.
- 11.4 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a new public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Poverty is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

- 11.5 In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 11.6 The duty continues to be a “have regard duty”, and the weight to be attached to it is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations.

Background documents and originator

Appendix A: Working together to tackle poverty in Lewisham – Final report of the Lewisham Poverty Commission

Appendix B: Working together to tackle poverty in Lewisham – Final report of the Lewisham Poverty Commission, Executive Summary

Further information about the Lewisham Poverty Commission and its work can be found here: www.lewisham.gov.uk/povertycommission

For further information, please contact Simone van Elk, 020 831 46441