



**Resources and Public Realm
Scrutiny Committee**
10th May 2021

**Report from the Assistant Chief
Executive**

A Fairer Future - Ending Poverty in Brent

**Review of the implementation of the Poverty Commission
recommendations**

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
No. of Appendices:	One: Appendix 1 – Delivery Plan
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report presents to the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny an update on delivery of the Poverty Commission recommendations, as well as progress made on the actions raised by the Scrutiny Committee in December 2020.

2.0 Recommendations for Scrutiny

The Committee is asked to:

- 2.1 Be assured of the implementation of the Poverty Commission recommendations as agreed by Cabinet, noting the update contained in this

report on the delivery of the Poverty Commission recommendations and the additional actions raised at the December 2020 scrutiny meeting.

3.0 Detail

Background information

- 3.1 Brent's Poverty Commission was established in January 2020. The Poverty Commission was commissioned by the Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform, Cllr Eleanor Southwood. It was independently chaired by Lord Best OBE.
- 3.2 The Commission included local, regional and national stakeholders and experts in their fields. Although established by the council, the Commission itself was fully independent and non-party political. The work of the Chair and Commissioners focused on four workstreams:
- Housing
 - Economy and jobs
 - Financial inclusion and:
 - Welfare

The Commission found that these issues are frequently inter-related and that those in poverty often face challenges across these areas.

- 3.3 The pandemic has highlighted the impacts poverty has on people's lives. It has also shown how easy it is for events to put people into poverty. The immediate and longer-term impacts of the pandemic and future challenges to the national and local economies reinforce the importance of the council prioritising actions and resources on those areas that are most important for the people of Brent. Both in meeting the current situation and ensuring the recovery does not leave anyone behind, tackling poverty is a key priority for the council. It plays a key role in the overall delivery of the Borough Plan 2021-2022 adopted by Full Council in February 2021.
- 3.4 The Poverty Commission report and recommendations were presented to Cabinet on 7 September where all of the recommendations were accepted. The delivery plans were endorsed by Full Council on 23 November 2020 and approved by Cabinet on 7 December 2020.

Progress update

- 3.5 The delivery plan (Appendix A) updates the Committee on delivery of the recommendations. The delivery plan is set within the context of the Borough Plan 2021-2022 and its five priorities, highlighting which priority area each recommendation supports.
- 3.6 Officers have put in place mechanisms to ensure performance is captured, reviewed and acted upon as necessary. The plan covers functions across the council, and the service areas are responsible for delivery of specific projects within each workstream. Key performance measures for the Poverty

Commission delivery plan will also form part of the council's overall performance framework, which is currently being finalised for 2021/22. Quarterly corporate performance reports are presented to this Scrutiny Committee.

3.7 The following paragraphs give a high-level summary of progress to date.

Housing

- On track to exceed the target to build 1,000 new council homes by 2024.
- The review of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) is underway with research commissioned to inform future activity, ensuring we maximise our impact.
- The council has successfully secured funding to increase the capacity in the Housing First Support scheme to 18 units.

Economy and jobs

- Commissions are underway for Willesden, Church End and Harlesden to consider diversification in town centres.
- The Affordable Workspace Strategy and Meanwhile Use Strategy are being implemented.
- Work is progressing to bring back the Picture Palace into use as a community run space.
- The council successfully secured funds for a Harlesden Gateway High Streets Heritage Action Zone.
- Brent Works continues to host online workshops to promote careers and a series of events with local businesses to promote Disability Confidence will continue in 2021.
- Participatory budgeting method is being used to allocate the Carbon Offset fund. This process will enhance public engagement.
- Social value commitments span the five Borough Plan priority areas and include the offer of specialist training as well as opportunities for engagement and collaboration.
- Cabinet in March 2021 agreed to apply the London Living Wage (LLW) for the Special Needs Transport Managed service.

Financial inclusion and welfare

- Work is ongoing to tackle digital exclusion working with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and other key partners.
- Community Hubs continue to support residents, with strengthening of relationships and referral pathways between food aid agencies and Brent Hubs. In addition, Hubs have been able to provide emergency financial support for residents in food and fuel hardship.
- Cabinet on 8 March 2021 agreed to extend the Resident Support Fund and the continuation of an interest free loan arrangement.
- Tackling Child Poverty has now been added as an explicit action within the refocused Borough Plan 2021-2022, supporting the Every Opportunity to Succeed priority.
- The draft Youth Strategy is being developed following successful engagement with young people.
- Tackling fuel poverty forms part of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) Review, and is a key workstream in the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy.

Community Hubs continue to give advice on tackling fuel poverty, as well as providing fuel vouchers, remotely during the pandemic.

- We also continue to work with partners to tackle fuel poverty, Brent is part of a West London Consortium of Boroughs who have now been awarded funding under the Green Homes Grant – Local Authority Delivery.
- A new comprehensive domestic energy advice programme and referral network for Brent’s residents and businesses is being developed.

The consultative group

3.8 As part of the delivery plan process and in response to the overview recommendation:

“We recommend that Brent Council establishes a consultative group ...” a consultative group has been brought together with representation from elected members, local, regional and community organisations. Membership of the group is as follows:

- Cllr Afzal
- Cllr Kabir
- Chris Murray, Young Brent Foundation
- Jacqueline Carr, Citizens Advice Brent
- Atara Fridler, Crisis
- Theresa McGrady, Step Up Hub
- Claudia Sumner, Child Poverty Action Group
- Paul Hunter, Smith Institute
- Connie Cullen, Shelter

The consultative group members represent housing, economy and jobs, financial inclusion and welfare – the workstreams of the Commission. The group has met twice already and will meet four times in year one. The first meeting agreed the terms of reference of the group as well as the focus for future activity. At the second meeting the group was presented with an overview of the Resident Support Fund and the Ethical Debt Recovery draft policy for comment. It also discussed reducing period poverty (see following paragraphs for detail) and future actions in this area. Future activity includes a discussion on progress and performance for each of the workstreams.

Reducing Period Poverty

3.9 Period poverty can be defined as affecting people who do not have enough money to access the sanitary products they need. It is a form of poverty that has particular impacts on ensuring people have a socially acceptable standard of living and can participate fully in society. Period poverty was recommended as an area for focus at the December 2020 scrutiny meeting.

3.10 The government launched a scheme in January 2020 to give out free period (menstruation) products in schools. State schools and colleges in England can order free period products for students as part of a government scheme to tackle period poverty. During the pandemic, the scheme remains in operation

and schools and colleges are still able to order a range of period products through the online portal and distribute them to students, whether they are learning from home or at school or college. National and local charities provide sanitary products free of charge including [Freedom4Girls](#), [Bloody Good Period](#) and [The Hygiene Bank](#).

- 3.11 The council has undertaken research to review what support is available to reduce period poverty. A communications plan has been developed to ensure that the support that is available is highlighted to those who need it. Further work includes using the Community Hubs in Brent to increase support in reducing period poverty through signposting to provision, as well as linking with national and local programmes.

Engagement with the Unions

- 3.12 This is an area that was raised at the last scrutiny meeting. The council is committed to engaging with the unions as a key stakeholder and this is being progressed.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this report at this stage, however, legal advice will be sought in respect of each recommendation contained within the delivery plan.

6.0 Equality Implications

- 6.1 Brent is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion; the council is determined to be an exemplar of good practice in equality, diversity and human rights and it is our policy to treat everyone fairly and with respect. We aim to ensure that all our current and future residents, staff and stakeholders are treated fairly and receive appropriate, accessible services, and fair and equal opportunities.

- 6.2 This commitment requires that equality considerations play a key role in our decision-making processes and that our policies are fully compliant with the duties placed on us as a public sector body by the Equality Act 2010. Our Equality Analyses (EAs) ensure that we follow through on our commitment to equality and they provide a method for clearly demonstrating the necessary legal compliance.

- 6.3 The Equality Act 2010 replaced the pre-existing anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. The legislation covers the exercise of public functions, employment and work, goods and services, premises, associations, transport and education. The act prohibits victimisation and harassment, and all of the following forms of discrimination: direct; indirect; by association; by perception; or discrimination arising from disability. When considering the Public Sector

Equality Duty pursuant to section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it,

6.4 The Public Sector Equality Duty covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The purpose of the duty is to enquire into whether a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic. In other words, the indirect discriminatory effects of a proposed decision. Due regard is the regard that is appropriate in all the circumstances.

6.5 Delivery of the Poverty Commission recommendations supports the council to continue to meet the Public Sector Equality Duties. Equality Impact Assessments will be completed as projects are progressed. Those already completed will be reviewed as projects move through the implementation stage. The work of the Poverty Commission delivery plan will result in a positive impact across the protected characteristics, as well as for residents experiencing other social deprivations.

7.0 Any Other Implications (HR, Property etc. - if necessary)

7.1 There are no other implications.

8.0 Proposed Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

8.1 The Lead Member commissioned the work of the Poverty Commission and has been consulted throughout the process including in the development of the delivery plan. Ward Members are represented on the consultative group.

Report sign off:

Shazia Hussain
Assistant Chief Executive