

	Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny 9 March 2022
	Report from the Assistant Chief Executive
Poverty Commission Update	

Wards Affected:	All
Open or Partly Exempt	Open
No of Appendices	None
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.

2.0 Recommendations for Scrutiny

The Committee is asked to:

2.1 Note progress on implementation of the Poverty Commission recommendations as agreed by Cabinet and the proposed focus for year two.

3.0 Detail

Background information

- 3.1 Brent's Poverty Commission was commissioned in January 2020 by the Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform, Cllr Eleanor Southwood. It was independently chaired by Lord Best OBE. It included local, regional and national stakeholders and experts in their fields and was both independent of the Council and non-party political.
- 3.2 Based on its analysis of the key causes of poverty in Brent, the Commission's recommendations focused on the following 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. Reflecting this, delivery is underway across all of the workstreams led by cross-council groups as well as individual service areas. The reducing poverty consultative group, comprising councillors and key local and national organisations, has also played a key role in this work, reviewing progress, feeding into key policies at draft stage and acting as a critical friend.

- 3.3 Tackling poverty is a 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. The pandemic has highlighted the impacts poverty has on people's lives and how easy it is for events to put people into poverty. Many are still feeling the impacts of the pandemic and the measures that had to be taken to respond to it. These effects are now being compounded by the cost of living crisis, with higher energy bills and the planned increase in National Insurance in April set to squeeze the cash in people's pockets even further and have particular impacts on those in – or on the brink of – poverty (poorer households spend a higher proportion of their income on essentials like fuel and food).
- 3.4 Against this background the council is focusing on interventions targeting support for those who need it most and working to prevent residents from experiencing poverty. Support in place includes the Resident Support Fund to help those struggling with bills or the essentials. The council also automatically provides vouchers to help families with children eligible for free school meals to cover the cost of food over the school holidays.

Poverty in Brent

- 3.5 To support a socially acceptable quality of life, it is recognised that a household needs at least 60 per cent of median household income. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) calculates poverty in two ways; before housing costs (17.9% of households in Brent are in poverty) and after housing costs (33%¹ of households in Brent are in poverty – the sixth highest in London). Higher housing costs in London mean that these costs consume a large proportion of households' income and we can see this clearly in the Brent figures. The lack of consistent datasets means that poverty rates over the

¹ www.ons.gov.uk *Small area model-based households in poverty estimates covering middle layer super output areas financial year ending 2014*

past 10 years are not available at borough level and are only provided at regional and national level based on households below average incomes (HBAI). It is recognised that this is a gap and a number of agencies are exploring how data can be made available at a borough level in a more timely way. However Land Registry data suggest average house prices in Brent have increased by 69.7% between February 2012 and December 2021², while gross weekly pay for full-time workers in Brent has increased by 14.9%³.

- 3.6 Child Poverty rates in Brent - the percentage of children living in poverty (after housing costs) is 40% in 2019/20⁴ (the 12th highest in London). The published data goes back to 2014/15 and illustrates that child poverty has ranged between 39.6% and 40.9% over these 5 years. Brent's figure compares with that for Tower Hamlets at 55.8% (the highest of any London borough) and Newham at 50% and Richmond at 17.2% (the lowest). The End Child Poverty Coalition research has attributed the high cost of housing and low wages as key drivers behind these figures.

Progress update

3.7 Housing

- The council is well on track to exceed its target to build 1,000 new council homes by 2024. Some 655 homes have already been delivered, with another 382 currently onsite and a further 198 awaiting planning consent. In August 2021, the Council was awarded a further allocation of £111m from the GLA Affordable Housing Programme 2021-26 with the objective of delivering a further 701 homes - in addition to the existing programme by - 2028.
- The council is working with Future of London to better understand the lived experience of people living in the private rented sector in Brent and what the council and its partners can do to better support tenants. This work is at draft report and recommendations stage.
- The number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation is now at 1,625, a 12% reduction from quarter 3 in the previous year.
- The council has successfully secured funding to increase the capacity in the Housing First Support scheme to 18 units. All 18 units are now occupied and the residents are receiving intensive support.
- Following examination and modifications, the Local Plan was adopted at Full Council in February. The plan includes a new policy which requires a financial contribution towards the provision of affordable housing in schemes proposing four to nine units. All new developments are required to meet high sustainability standards to reduce energy costs and fuel poverty.

3.8 Economy and Jobs

- 16,250 grant awards totalling over £110 million have been paid to businesses as part of pandemic recovery support.
- A programme of targeted investments has been agreed for Wembley and Church End, including new public realm, street art and shutter art, events, pop up uses (e.g. a digital skills training centre), and a Church End community hub (High Street Challenge Fund £300,000 supported by the council).

² Land Registry <https://landregistry.data.gov.uk/app/ukhpi/browse?from=2012-02-01&location=http%3A%2F%2Flandregistry.data.gov.uk%2Fid%2Fregion%2Fbrent&to=2022-01-01&lang=en>

³ Nomis Labour Market Profile for Brent

https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157263/subreports/asher_time_series/report.aspx?

⁴ End Child Poverty Coalition (May 2021), Loughborough University – Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs

- The Buy Brent app was launched and has been downloaded over 2,000 times and is helping to support over 150 businesses across the borough.
- Nearly £300,000 has been secured towards affordable workspace provision. New affordable workspace is being provided in Wembley and at the Grand Union development.
- Brent Works have been part of a collaboration of partners creating an Employment and Skills Hub in Park Royal with a focus on increasing employment opportunities across the borough. A new Green Skills Academy, in partnership with the College of NW London, is due to open in 2022. Work continues to support people with disabilities into employment. Support includes at registration and interview stages. In-work support is provided for 6 months.
- Brent Works has supported 92 young people into Kickstart opportunities, 288 local residents into sustainable employment and 93 local residents into apprenticeships. The opportunities have included construction, finance, digital design, cake decorating, theatre assistants, teaching assistants and IT roles. Tailored apprenticeship sessions have been run during National Apprenticeship week in February. The Living Room, part of Brent Hubs team, supported 64 local residents into employment.
- The Moving on Up programme (MoU) has supported 96 young black men into employment.
- The London Living Wage is actively promoted across businesses and work is underway on the London Mayor's Good Work Standard⁵ that brings together best employment practice and links to resources and support from across London to help employers improve their organisations.
- As part of the development of the Youth Strategy, young people told us how important skills support and job opportunities were to them. These form a key part of the Youth Strategy that is now at implementation stage. Activity is focused on engagement and voice, skills and opportunities, wellbeing and mental health and the natural environment.
- Social value is delivering employment support and skills provision, including CV clinics and interview events as well as increasing the take-up of apprenticeships in the borough e.g. bricklaying, business administration and tennis coaching.

3.9 Financial Inclusion and Welfare

- As well as business grants, the council has supported residents via the Residents Support Fund with more than 1,500 applications processed from 1 April 2021 totalling £2.67 million. In addition 19 residents have been approved for an interest-free Credit Union loan totalling £87,300.
- To improve the digital skills of all residents, digital cafes have been established in the Harlesden and Kilburn Hubs run by Age UK and 50 Digital Champions are in place across council frontline services and the VCS. The Resident Support Fund has supported 427 households with 355 devices and 72 internet connections and the Digital Support Fund for Children has enabled 138 devices to be distributed to secondary school pupils. Businesses with under 50 employees can now apply for a digital package to support the development of their online presence and digital skills.
- Brent Hubs continue to support residents including providing emergency financial support for residents in food and fuel hardship as well as signposting e.g. to Credit

⁵ <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/business-and-economy/supporting-business/what-mayors-good-work-standard>

Unions. The Hubs had a total of 24,137 enquiries in 2021. Food aid and support with benefits continue to be priority areas of support however there is an increase in support needs relating to financial hardship and challenges in affording housing and the nature of enquiries is increasing in complexity. Outreach work is delivered at two local foodbanks with good take-up at both sites.

- A financial upskilling programme is underway delivering workshops to residents and community leaders within community settings (up to 340 residents). This includes mentoring, debt advice and debt management.
- Tackling fuel poverty forms part of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) Review, and is a key workstream in the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy. The Hubs continue to give advice on tackling fuel poverty, as well as providing fuel vouchers during the pandemic. A reducing fuel poverty toolkit has recently been launched by the council outlining the support available for residents.
- The Brent Health Matters programme is well established focused on reducing health inequalities across the borough, an additional £185k has been awarded to this programme. Over 30 Community Health Champions are in place. The council is working with partners to deliver a series of outreach events focused on diabetes and combining health education with clinical check-ups.
- Reducing Child Poverty in Brent is a corporate priority within the Borough Plan. There are a range of projects underway to reduce child poverty with an overview of these activities being maintained at a corporate level. This includes delivery on the Equalities Strategy with a focus on employment and the Black Community Action Plan including early intervention. On the frontline, this includes Brent's Family Wellbeing Centres that provide a core support offer to families and children across all age groups. Citizens Advice Brent operate in every centre and across a number of centres organisations and services including Let's Talk Money, Advice for Renters, Salusbury World and Stream Skills Advancement offer support and programmes, which cover topics such as legal advice, housing and finance.
- Funds such as the COVID Winter Grant and COVID Local Support grant schemes and the Household Support fund are used to support families in receipt of free school meals and other vulnerable households. The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme was piloted in Brent in 2021 and over 3,800 places were accessed over 2021, with children attending receiving a nutritious meal each day. A key element of the programme is to also signpost families to other advice and support.

Reducing Period Poverty

- 3.10 In addition to the recommendations from the Poverty Commission the Scrutiny Committee raised the importance of reducing period poverty in the borough. 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.
- 3.11 Brent is the first London borough to introduce vending machines with free period products across six public buildings. This offers those facing period poverty a discreet route for getting the products they need. Take up has been positive across all sites and feedback has shown that people are really supportive of the approach. Alongside

this the national scheme for schools and colleges is being promoted as well as signposting to national charities for advice and support.

Priorities for 2022-2023

3.12 The key priorities for the forthcoming year based on the recommendations and work undertaken to date include a continuation of the council's house building programme, implementation of the private sector review, development of a comprehensive private sector housing enforcement strategy, employment support (including our work to support people with disabilities into employment) and reducing period poverty. Reducing child poverty as well as reducing fuel and food poverty (including financial and welfare support) are also priority areas across the workstreams. The Brent Health Matters programme and tailored health outreach activity will continue to be progressed. Officers will undertake further work in this area over the coming months. The consultative group will play a vital role in helping us further define and refine the priorities for 2022/23. Their contribution to delivery in this first year has made a real positive difference.

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 arising directly from this report but legal advice may be required in respect of specific future initiatives within the priorities identified.

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 individual programmes and projects are progressed. Those already completed will be reviewed as projects move through the implementation stage. The reducing poverty workstreams 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 engaged throughout the delivery stages. Ward Members are represented on the consultative group.

Report sign off:

Shazia Hussain

Assistant Chief Executive