

Poverty and Worklessness Commission meeting minutes
11am, Wednesday 7th September 2016
Hammersmith Town Hall, King Street.

PRESENT

Commissioners:

Christina Smyth
Yasser Awad
Kam Babrah
Paul Doe
Alison Inglis-Jones
Tom Pearson
Zarar Quayyum
Kamini Sanghani
Howard Sinclair
Alex Tambourides
Alison Taylor

LBHF:

Zahra Beg
Tom Conniffe
Nivene Powell
Rob Rix
Helen Rowbottom

Apologies:

Rosalind Duhs
Shani Lee
Howard Sinclair
Cllr Fennimore

The following summarises the discussion of the Hammersmith & Fulham Poverty and Worklessness Commission's sixth meeting. Please contact tom.conniffe@lbhf.gov.uk for more information.

ACTIONS ARISING

A Tambourides/CS: Investigate Hounslow's social network mapping, potentially to replicate in H&F.

AIJ: Connect CAB to DWP to report about issues around UC advances.

TC/secretariat:

1. Find who is leading on the council's Customer First programme around the reconfiguration of customer services at the town hall.
2. Check the Social Value and Procurement task force report to check whether

apprenticeships are built in to the council's strategy.

3. Investigate whether a new methodology for collecting customer satisfaction has been produced yet.

CS: Consider setting up mechanism where local residents can sense-check recommendations ahead of the report being written.

KB:

1. Share the outcomes and evaluation of the job fair hosted at Hammersmith Town Hall with the Commission.

2. Investigate whether there is influence locally around the ESA contract.

FOCUS GROUP PROGRAMME – OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS

A series of focus groups were conducted around key cohorts experiencing issues around poverty and worklessness; older people, ex-offenders, BAME communities, mental health. General problems included cost of living, addiction, homelessness, relationship breakdown, domestic violence, and poor quality housing with delays in repairs. Complex issues include interrelated problems, with a presenting problem being the tip of the iceberg. These issues aren't being tackled holistically.

Benefits were also a significant area of focus. Changes to welfare provision, such as the introduction of Universal Credit and the 6 week gap receiving benefits are creating challenges in including digital exclusion, bureaucratic processes and significant issues around the ESA medical assessment process, declaring many fit for work who aren't.

Many people are unaware of services that are available, lack skills to gain sustainable employment and have issues with money management and budgeting. There is a perception of statutory services as being hostile, creating issues with trust. People felt they were not listened to properly, which is a barrier to community engagement and implementation of preventative services. Many also felt they were experiencing a revolving door service – being passed around different services without their issue being resolved.

Tentative Recommendations include a single point of contact, coordination of services, improved benefits support and referral schemes, more space for third sector organisations, more strategic leadership from council, increase in volunteering.

An overwhelming response from the focus groups was that local people were not getting access to local jobs. Shepherds Bush Housing Group have apprenticeships built in to their agreements and construction strategy. Other local organisations could follow this initiative.

The focus groups echo the previous Commission findings: the need for a single point of contact and a 'no wrong door' approach to help people navigate their way around the complex ecosystem of support services. It is important that this navigation role has strong links to existing services and departments to make things happen and liaise on behalf of the client to avoid a triage system. However, it would help alleviate clients needing to explain their situation multiple times, and a trained navigator can assess what clients need in the

round and alleviating potentially harm to the clients; many issues could be spotted instead of dealing with one in isolation.

CAB advisors have transformed the Food Bank offer, and focus group participants said they found it to be a safe place where they are not judged. The Food Bank will also be imminently conducting a mental health champions pilot in partnership with Deloitte. DWP are co-working with the housing benefits team in 145 King Street, particularly around Universal Credit and the benefit cap. The council is looking into a Customer First service to configure a new kind of frontline services for residents. A question remains around public perception levels of trust around statutory services: do people want to come to the town hall, or would it better to fund community support around geographies according to demand e.g. estates? There are existing channels bringing together services locally; People First, the Advice Station via the Law Centre and the council's own on the website.

However, the Commission's vision is for something bigger, more strategic and with more community involvement. It would be valuable for the council and local services to have a mutual feedback mechanism to communicate interest around trust and quality of services delivered to local people.

EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

The Commission's report should delineate between things that are structural and increase levels of poverty in the borough, such as levels of rent collection after the introduction of Universal Credit. The Commission can't change government policy but it can mitigate its impacts. In order to charge a range of organisations and actors with the agency to make an impact on levels of poverty and worklessness in the borough, there should be shared objectives between, for example, the police, health and housing.

The impact of low levels of public trust and satisfaction around statutory services renders people potentially vulnerable to approach high-risk options, such as loan sharks. It is important that statutory services have comprehensive customer service journeys and satisfaction measurement mechanisms to ensure no issues fall between the cracks. Two ways to approach are i) a practical process of referrals and signposting, and ii) strategic partnerships and closer links between organisations.

The emerging recommendations need to be reviewed at a senior level across the entire range of organisations with local presence to identify which actions are already being taken forward elsewhere.

Three working groups will flesh out the recommendation sets. These are as follows:

1. Targets, outcomes and measurement
Paul Doe (co-ordinator)
Alex Tambourides
Kamini Sanghani
Anna Waterman

Poverty and Worklessness Commission

Zahra Beg

Helen Rowbottom

2. Community hubs

Alex Tambourides
Alison Inglis-Jones/Daphine Aikens
Alison Taylor
Anna Waterman
Nivene Powell (co-ordinator)
Zahra Beg

3. Volunteering

Alison Inglis-Jones/Daphine Aikens
Christina Smyth (co-ordinator)
Kam Babrah
Paul Doe
Tom Pearson
Rob Rix
Anna Waterman
Zarar Qayyum

COMMISSION REPORT – DRAFT STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

Commissioners are asked to deliberate about whether they'd like to write a chapter for the report or work on feasibility for the recommendations.

The Commission will devise a communications plan, with potentially a conference and a 'road show' to share findings and intelligence across the council and local agencies.

AOB

The Commission's draft report and recommendations will be finished by December.

The next Commission will take place on 16th November to, inter alia, review the MEL qualitative research findings.