

**Poverty and Worklessness Commission meeting note
11am, Wednesday 16th November 2016
Hammersmith Town Hall, King Street.**

PRESENT

Commissioners:

Daphine Aikens
Kam Babrah
Rosalind Duhs
Tom Pearson
Zarar Quayyum
Kamini Sanghani
Howard Sinclair
Christina Smyth (Chair)
Alex Tambourides
Alison Taylor

LBHF:

Cllr Sue Fennimore
Zahra Beg
Rachel Casey
Kevin Caulfield
Tom Conniffe
Nivene Powell
Rob Rix
Helen Rowbottom

Apologies:

Paul Doe
Shani Lee
Kamini Sanghani
Howard Sinclair
Adam Tinson

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

ACTIONS ARISING

ZQ/All: Identify findings and information from contacts and own work from people who have managed to lift themselves out of poverty. What is their story, and what made the difference for them?

HR: Complete and send round the collation of the Commission's best practice research.

1. INTERVIEW PROGRAMME – OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS

MEL Research were commissioned to conduct independent, qualitative research with 104 Hammersmith and Fulham residents by telephone and face to face about their experiences of poverty and worklessness.

Target groups for research included:

1. 35+ unemployed
2. BAME
3. Long-term unemployed
4. People living with mental health issues
5. Older people

The mental health findings matched up with London-level data. Overall, at least 30 people reported experiencing mental health issues.

During discussions, some sources of support were mentioned, although not frequently. The Job Centre came up a lot as needing to provide more tailored support bespoke to individuals. The Council and Citizens Advice Bureau were also mentioned. Many people mentioned turning to friends and family as a source of support, rather than a support organisation.

Mental health issues were a feature of all the target groups.

1. 35+ unemployed group

- Single parents, mainly women, account for 10% of this group
- Many had caring responsibilities juggling home life and working
- Childcare costs were a significant barrier to work
- A skills gap was identified
- The available local jobs weren't necessarily in the sectors people wanted to work in; retail, construction, care – with an overall trend of lower wages and 0 hour contracts

2. BAME and migrants

- Many migrants came to seek work, not live on benefits
- A main barrier to finding work was the lack of recognition of foreign qualifications.
- Interviewees were primarily from Afghanistan, Jamaica, Somalia and Sudan
- Language barriers were a common issue; for those whose first language wasn't English, interviews were tricky
- Similar issues were experienced by people across different migrant backgrounds

3. Long-term unemployed

- The cost of childcare is a significant barrier to work; many mums are looking for jobs but can't find positions with the flexibility to fit in with school hours
- Limited work history

- Lots of people didn't feel that they weren't given a chance and needed placements, internships, skills and community involvement, all linked to confidence and self esteem

4. Older residents (aged 55+)

- Many were out of work caring for sick relatives
- Living in a transient borough, many don't know their neighbours
- Out of work due to necessity rather than choice
- Digital exclusion; many mentioned not having a computer, so were unable to take up the advice offered by the Job Centre around online job-hunting, and there was no offered alternative.
- The impact of rising pension ages was mentioned – many had to wait a few more years for their pension, affecting their income. There was a suggestion of flexible retirement schemes.
- Older paperwork was harder to process and legitimate.

It was noted in discussion that many people approaching the Job Centre feel isolated and emotionally inadequate because they can't use the IT, and that, nationally, 1 in 10 people are dyslexic. The Job Centre's Work Coaches are currently undergoing intensive digital training to make sure people have the right skills, refer appropriately, and provide specific support for people aged 50+.

It was also noted that there's an accessibility barrier to available support. A legacy of the Commission's work could be to determine through which routes target groups access support and, more widely, where people go in the borough to determine touchpoints with residents (not necessarily a place offering institutional or third sector support services).

Overall barriers to employment

- Low skills and qualifications
- Language barriers
- 'Benefits trap'
- Limited work history and experience
- Associated travel and transport costs
- Care responsibilities
- Lack of flexibility of hours
- Quality of housing - mentioned a few times. Leaks and has impact on how you come across at interviews
- Mental health and health conditions

In-work poverty (people earning less than £284/week)

- Lower paid jobs
- Insecure contracts (0 hours, common in the retail sector)
- Higher paid jobs out of the borough (in City of London, for example)
- Impacts on personal and family life

Emotional state

- Parents split up
- Teenage pregnancy
- Lack of confidence and self-worth
- People hadn't planned their lives this way.
- The research used the Marmot Review as a template, which finds that being in good work is better for health than being out of work. But precarious work is not good for people's health.

Future aspirations

Many had a lack of certainty and didn't see a way out, but their hopes are centred around their children doing better than they did.

- Better jobs and more stable and full time employment.
- Retrain or gain new qualifications
- Get on the property ladder or live in better quality housing
- People anticipated a knock-on improvement to their health.

Customer journey maps were constructed from interviews with 10 people.

Findings:

- Many live on the edge of poverty despite working
- Need support from continuing education in flexible way
- Challenges around management of serious health conditions
- Mental health conditions
- The Southampton 'Working Well' pilot has been successful

Conclusions: people didn't plan their lives this way, don't want to live on benefits, do want a job, have a perception that work doesn't pay, and mental health impacts sustainable employment. More dedicated personal support needed. Confidence speaking to employers is an issue.

The Commission noted that it would be good to harness knowledge about people who have lifted themselves out of poverty. It was also noted that the word 'flexible' should be differentiated between a good kind of flexible – hours that work with people's lives, particularly around childcare responsibilities – and flexible hour contracts, which often provide unstable and insecure employment.

2. COMMISSION REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A discussion on the emphasis and nature of the recommendations took place, with Commissioners invited to help shape the recommendations.

3. PROGRAMME DEADLINES

2016

Fri 25 Nov – Deadline for Commissioners to submit comments on draft report v0.1 + executive summary

Wed 30 Nov – Deadline for Helen to finalise report draft v0.2 – send to Christina and Tom for edits

Wed 07 Dec – Deadline for production of report draft v0.3 – consultation draft

Fri 09 Dec – Send to consultees for detailed comments. Groups as defined in phase 4 (testing and evaluation) of detailed work plan.

2017

Mon 09 Jan – Deadline for comments on consultation draft report

Wed 18 Jan – Eighth Commission meeting – approval of final report

Tue 31 Jan – Health PAC to consider recommendations and advise on Council's response

Mon 03 Apr – Cabinet to agree PWC report and Council's response

Mid Apr – date tbc – launch conference at venue tbc – Hammersmith Town Hall?

4. AOB

Could there be a 'road show' of the consultation draft in December to the focus group participants to seek their opinions on the recommendations? TC to ask NP to investigate on her return to work.

More graphics should be incorporated into the final report to clearly illustrate findings.