

DRAFT: Poverty and Worklessness Commission meeting minutes
10am, Tuesday 3rd November 2015
Hammersmith Town Hall

Present:

Commissioners:

Christina Smyth
Shani Lee
Paul Doe
Daphine Aikens

LBHF:

Cllr Sue Fennimore

Kim Dero
Tom Conniffe
Duncan Smith
Helen Rowbottom
Rob Rix
Camellia Sinclair
Anwar Yussuf

Apologies:

Alex Tambourides
Howard Sinclair

This note is a summary of the main points discussed at the inaugural meeting of the Hammersmith & Fulham Poverty and Worklessness Commission. Please contact tom.conniffe@lbhf.gov.uk for more information.

1. Approving the Vision and TOR (Paper 1), roles and protocols (Paper 2) and workplan, process and timescales (Papers 3 and 4)

The Commission approved the Vision, subject to an emphasis on innovative solutions for local decision-makers, influencers and other local organisations, in addition to regional and national policy-makers. It is important that the Commission's recommendations can inform their work. There will need to be clear rules of engagement for potential partners so that they can sign up and participate in ways to alleviate poverty and worklessness.

It should be explicitly stated that the Commission is reporting to Cllr Steve Cowan and the administration of Hammersmith and Fulham. The Commission has their full support without any pre-ordained solutions having been set. The report will be presented with recommendations to the Economic Regeneration, Housing and the Arts Policy and Accountability Committee and to Cabinet. Cllr Fennimore, the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, will provide full support to the work of the Commission, but will not attempt to steer it towards particular solutions.

A list of all contributors to the Commission so far - commissioners, consultants and additional contributors - will be circulated after the meeting. The process of recruiting contributors is still open and ongoing. A local GP has recently been recruited with extensive frontline experience of the issues and challenges around poverty and worklessness.

The role of reference groups was discussed; they could be organised by sector or arranged around functions and outcomes such as health and skills to develop coordination across departments and agencies from the start. However, due to these cross-cutting issues affecting individuals simultaneously, reference groups should perhaps focus on process and design to provide holistic support for people.

The Commission's work will be transparent and accessible. Commissioners and contributors' names will appear on the website unless they indicate that they wish their name to be withheld.

The Commission agreed to the work plan and timeline, and there was consensus that the work would need to be flexible in adapting to the ongoing findings and analysis.

2. Engaging with the community

A key aim of the Commission will be to engage directly with people affected by poverty and worklessness. Where possible, the Commission should work with community groups and leaders who have already established trust amongst the community to gain valuable insight, information and participation. The Commission should be relevant to people in the borough. All relevant communications channels should be developed to facilitate this.

3. Data analysis of borough statistics (Paper 5)

There are various overlapping data sets and also data gaps. This will require analysis, synthesis and supplementing. Some preliminary observations on existing data follow.

The unemployment rate in the northern wards of the borough is double that of the south. The north of the borough has a higher concentration of social housing, with a third of people renting from a social landlord. Overcrowding is an issue. However, there are still pockets of deprivation in the south of the borough and, while the borough has become more affluent, the deprived areas have been somewhat left behind. There are different sub-domains and demographics to explore income deprivation through, such as children and older people, both of which have worse than average deprivation scores in Hammersmith and Fulham.

There is part time work available in the borough that is not being taken up by local people. There is a relatively high rate of female unemployment, and other sub groups have relatively high unemployment rates. There is also a high business density and churn but poor survival rates. It is difficult to obtain data on why businesses fail, or whether they have failed or have in fact moved out of the borough. The cost of maintaining premises are believed to be a significant factor in this.

Although the economy of west London is strong it is also ephemeral and not all jobs are sustainable, which pushes people into poverty.

Different cohorts particularly experiencing poverty and worklessness need to be identified. Tackling entrenched poverty and worklessness is going to be one of the biggest challenges of the Commission, and understanding the cash economy is going to be intrinsic to this. Sensitively-conducted, quality research should explore how the cash economy is working, and enable people to speak anonymously and frankly about what is going on, shedding light on the underground economy to give a better picture of the economic situation in the borough.

Property prices are a key metric to poverty and worklessness. The data can give a better picture of how house prices affect the rate of churn, employment and demographics in the borough. The living conditions in the large rented sector in the borough also require investigation.

4. The relationship between poverty and worklessness

The Commission will look at the intersection between poverty and worklessness, but will not be narrowly focused on employment statistics and the job market. Other correlative factors, such as health/mental health, disability, housing, ageing and education are at the root of the issues and so will also be considered to tackle the causes as well as the symptoms of poverty and worklessness.

A review of literature and best practice will inform the metrics for measuring poverty and worklessness. A solely income-based metric does not take into account access to services and living conditions.

ACTIONS

AP1 All Identify potential contributors to the Commission.

AP2 All Notify the Chairman within a week if they wish to remain anonymous (if not, names will appear on Hammersmith and Fulham website).

AP3 All Send any relevant papers, articles and documents to tom.conniffe@lbhf.gov.uk by Friday 13th November.

AP4 CS, SL, PD, DA, AT, HS Commissioners to consider in which area of work they could take the strategic lead.

AP5 TC Send all attendees a full timetable, complete with dates, by Friday 13th November.

AP5 TC Update Commissioners on progress between Commission meetings by sending a fortnightly email

AP6 TC Set up a Twitter account and investigate other social media provision (through the Communications Department).

AP7 CS, TC Personally brief Commissioners who could not attend first meeting