

POVERTY

Brent Council

Reducing Poverty in Brent

Poverty is increasingly an outer London problem. The urgency of the issue has been reinforced by the pandemic, which has proved just how easy it can be to experience poverty – but also how much can be achieved by local action. Brent council has long been committed to tackling poverty, the blight it casts on peoples’ lives and the resources we use to help deal with the consequences.

While we had the facts and figures and knew both its impacts on residents’ quality of life and the issues our services address, we needed a thorough understanding of poverty in our borough – its causes, consequences and how to make a real difference in tackling it.

We wanted to supplement the expertise within the council by drawing on wider expertise and experience and learn lessons about what works elsewhere. And we wanted to understand the perspectives of people experiencing poverty. Our focus was finding ways of making real change, addressing the roots of poverty – unconfined by what we have thought and done in the past.

To meet this brief, Cllr Eleanor Southwood (Lab) - our Cabinet Member for housing and welfare reform - commissioned an independent Brent Poverty Commission in January 2020. Chaired by the former chief executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Lord Richard Best, it included experts and frontline practitioners with in-depth knowledge of the issues locally, across London and nationally.

The Commission’s report, [**A Fairer Future – Ending Poverty in Brent**](#) was published in August 2020. It explains why so many of Brent’s residents do not have enough money to afford what’s needed for an acceptable standard of living and to participate fully in society. These themes are informed by accounts from those experiencing poverty, explaining what it means to them every day and the difference that advice and support services can make.

Building on this evidence, experience and expertise the Commission made more than 40 recommendations to tackle the causes and consequences of poverty in Brent, including:

- prioritising affordable housing and reviewing the private rented sector;
- encouraging take-up of the London Living Wage;
- highlighting advice and support provision;
- promoting financial inclusion and
- establishing a consultative group to oversee implementation.

Reflecting the complex, multi-faceted causes and consequences of poverty, the recommendations were addressed to the council and the local, regional and national partners across sectors and service areas who will have a part in delivering the recommendations.

The Commission worked through the Covid pandemic. It saw the council's response to the crisis as a demonstration of the value of local action and commended the council for the imaginative actions it already takes on reducing poverty. It called on Government to enhance powers and finances for local authorities so they can do more. It also suggested other local authorities could look to adopt a similar model to pinpoint area-specific issues and tackle poverty nationwide.

The council's cabinet has accepted the Commission report and its recommendations in full. Tackling poverty is a key theme of our Borough Plan. We are taking the report's recommendations forward through delivery plans covering housing; economy and jobs; and financial inclusion and welfare. Work is underway in all of these areas and is progressing well. We are using every opportunity to tackle poverty working with partners across sectors, teams across the council and our residents.

Actions include:

Housing

- Continuing delivery of one of London's biggest council house building programmes in London.
- Work is underway to better understand what it is like to live in the private rented sector in Brent and what the council and its partners can do to better support tenants.
- Securing funding to boost our Housing First Support scheme to give more single homeless people with complex needs access to somewhere they can call home.

Economy and Jobs

- The council has rolled out a range of grants and support measures to businesses.
- Providing local businesses with training support, including a dedicated helpline.
- The council is a London Living Wage accredited employer and our ambition is to ensure that more residents have access to good quality jobs.
- Helping residents to get back into work through our #KeepBrentWorking campaign.
- Delivering our Work and Health programme supporting long term unemployed people into employment.

Financial Inclusion and Welfare

- Introducing a Resident Support Fund to provide emergency financial support to residents.
- Reducing digital exclusion – including providing digital packages and laptops to residents and rolling out full fibre connectivity across the council's housing stock and key community spaces.
- Reducing fuel poverty – linked to our Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy activity.
- Continuing to work with health partners to help reduce health inequalities including targeted communication working with local community leaders and the establishment of community champions across the borough.

For the full report visit the council website www.brent.gov.uk

For further information

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