



## POVERTY



## Oldham Council

### Oldham Poverty Truth Commission

Oldham's Poverty Truth Commission (PTC) was launched on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and brings together 13 people with lived experience of poverty and multiple disadvantage (grassroots commissioners) with 13 civic and business commissioners to identify key issues and co-produce solutions to tackling poverty.

The PTC is co-ordinated and managed by Action Together, the borough's umbrella VCFSE organisation, and is facilitated and supported by the Council's Corporate Policy Team and colleagues from the Shared Health Foundation. It meets monthly for 3 hours and grassroots and civic commissioners are encouraged and supported to meet outside of the formal meetings to build relationships. Relationship building is a central tenet of the PTC – and requires a different way of working, one that builds strong inter-personal relationships between commissioners to achieve change rather than drive change through external targets and outputs.

From the outset the approach has been to embed the PTC within our existing policy making and decision-making structures; it is integral to our wider work to tackle poverty and disadvantage in the borough. The PTC forms a key strand of our Partnership Anti-poverty Action Plan and, once completed, will shape the borough's Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Commissioners are represented on the strategic and senior level partnership Poverty Steering Group and the VCFSE led Poverty Action Group. They have already engaged in the policy making process and provided feedback on both the refresh of the Oldham Plan and the council's Corporate Plan; and the Health Inequalities Plan.

The PTC is now half way through its schedule and three key themes have emerged from the PTC meetings so far, which are now the subject of further development and action:

- Emotionally intelligent systems and points of contact
- Reducing stigma and raising hope
- Places of belonging

In addition, there is an over-arching theme to develop a best practice model of co-production.



In terms of translating PTC ideas into action, work is starting in earnest to develop some key projects under each of the themes. Recently, a link has been made between the PTC and the Council's Changing Futures programme. This programme, led by Adult Social Care, seeks to engender system change and different ways of working to support people, especially young women, experiencing complex and multiple disadvantage. Although only at an early stage, it is likely that the grassroots commissioners will have the opportunity to apply their experience to inform and potentially participate in, the development of a peer mentoring approach.

The themes in relation to emotionally intelligent responses and reducing stigma have been flagged with the council's Human Resources and Organisational Development team -with a view to informing recruitment, workforce development and training plans.

Learning so far...

For a process that relies heavily on building relationships, beginning the PTC in the midst of the Covid 19 pandemic, has not been ideal. It has been challenging in terms of engaging

commissioners and maintaining attendance, especially from our civic and business commissioners, who have been under significant pressure to respond to and prioritise Covid related and crisis responses. This challenge is likely to continue as demand on services across the system escalates as the cost of living crisis unfolds.

Responding to increased demand for emergency/crisis response services, together with significant organisational change across public services makes it difficult for those leaders to protect the thinking time and space, and the additional time needed in the PTC process to develop ideas with the grassroots commissioners. This has led to frustration, particularly from the grassroots commissioners, and has generated a feeling of lack of commitment. In the PTC spirit of open-ness and honesty, these issues have been raised and are being addressed. It is vital that a solution is found as support from senior leaders across the system is essential for the PTC's success in achieving change.

From a Council perspective, the PTC was established at a time of significant organisational change including a newly elected Council Leader, changes in the Council's senior management team and significant service restructuring, which has meant that maintaining a constant ownership and commitment at a Senior Leadership level to the Commission has been particularly challenging.

Challenges exist in determining success and how it's measured – the PTC is currently deliberating and possibly redefining what success looks like in Oldham; is for example, success about new projects that the PTC has developed or about influencing existing policies and practice and driving system change?

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