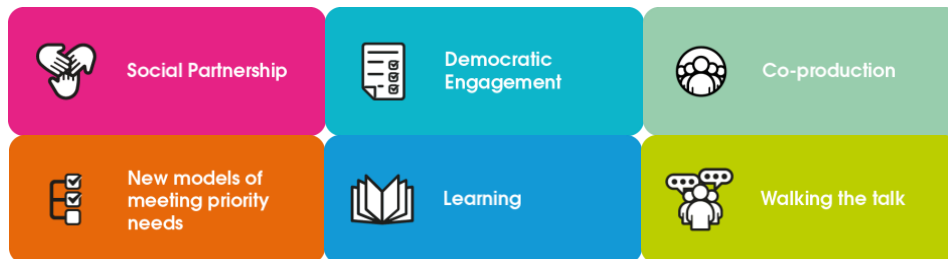




Co-operative Councils

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Oldham Council

Embedding the voice of lived experience in service design and delivery through co-production: Oldham Poverty Truth Commission

Poverty Truth Commissions (PTC) are a national model pioneered by the Poverty Truth Network. They seek to identify different approaches to addressing poverty through direct experience, strong relationships and humanising people as well as systems.

Oldham's Poverty Truth Commission brought together a dozen people with lived experience of poverty alongside a dozen people with power, influence or authority from across a range of council and health services, businesses and voluntary sector. Its aim was to better understand the causes of poverty, the challenges it presents both for the people experiencing it and the wider system - and identify ways to address these.

The PTC was formally launched in September 2021 with seed funding from Joseph Rowntree Foundation and funding from Oldham Council and Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group.

Modelling co-production from the start, colleagues at Shared Health and Action Together, Oldham's voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisation, worked for a year prior to the launch to recruit, support, and build the confidence and capacity of the lived experience commissioners to engage with and shape the PTC. This support continued throughout the process and was important for those commissioners still facing hardship and difficult circumstances, establishing relationships of trust as a solid foundation for their

ongoing participation. The Council's Corporate Policy team similarly recruited and supported the engagement of the business and civic commissioners.



Oldham Poverty Truth Commission

Over the next 12 months the PTC met regularly to define and address the issues they wanted to prioritise. Unlike many other PTC's Oldham focused on the identification of themes rather than specific target-driven projects, reflecting the commissioners' awareness of the need to tackle relational, structural and system barriers to achieve lasting change.

Three key themes were identified:

- Welcoming points of contact: Services that have time to listen well and show understanding and empathy towards people who contact them for help.
- Reducing stigma and raising hope: Helping to meet people's basic needs whilst also giving them opportunities to thrive and achieve.
- Places of belonging, knowledge and hope: Places where people can belong to a supportive community

Embedding the 3 themes began whilst the PTC was still underway, the escalating Cost of Living crisis providing an opportunity to take forward "Welcoming Points of Contact". The grassroots commissioners co-designed and helped to deliver the borough's Cost of Living response, working alongside senior officers and customer-facing staff from a range of organisations at the Cost of Living Summit in July 2022, to produce an Action Plan to support residents through the winter.



Oldham Poverty Action Network

The Action Plan required all services and staff to adopt a strengths-based, trauma informed approach to supporting people in or facing crisis. The lived experience commissioners partnered with Council and Action Together staff to deliver face to face training to approximately 360 colleagues from a range of services and organisations. Going forwards, the Council is embedding a trauma informed approach across the workforce and an action plan is being developed to support this, led by Public Health.

Following the conclusion of the Commission in September 2022, work has continued to embed the PTC themes and lived experience at strategic and operational levels. Strategically, the Oldham Poverty Action Network (OPAN) has taken up the PTC mantle and, with a core of the PTC's grassroots commissioners, has drawn in more partners from across the public and voluntary sector, together with funding from the Local Motion group of national foundations. Facilitated by Action Together three task groups have been established to make progress on their shared areas of work which continue to translate the PTC themes into action.

- 1) Building out from the cost-of-living response
- 2) Hope and aspirations: creating routes out of poverty
- 3) Building a joined-up approach to poverty alleviation & prevention

With a budget of £100,000 OPAN is able to test out ideas and develop proposals for longer term funding. Task Group 2 is currently focused on developing a model of volunteering which will 'reclaim volunteering for people experiencing hardship' and begin to operationalise routes out of poverty using a strengths-based approach. The aim is to recognise the ways people in poverty often already participate in their communities and

build on these strengths as a route out of spiralling hardship whilst also improving their own skills, health and wellbeing.

Taking forward the theme of creating places of belonging, lived experience commissioners have attended Planning for Real events in each of Oldham's five districts, helping to identify key community assets as part of a mapping exercise to inform future decisions in relation to the place-based integration of services. It is intended that the district hubs are welcoming places where residents can get help, information and advice when they need it, make links to other services and access opportunities for learning and development.

From the outset, the PTC aimed to raise awareness of the stigma associated with poverty which together with structural and system barriers, made it difficult for people experiencing hardship to get the right help and advice easily, quickly and in a way that recognised their individual strengths. This work continues now through OPAN and the development of the Oldham Systems Conditions Forum. The Forum is a newly created space to explore and tackle system conditions that are preventing people moving out of poverty, involving people with lived experience equitably alongside system partners.

In memory of Lynda Smith, Oldham Poverty Truth Commissioner.

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