

## **Wandsworth Cost of Living Commission Evidence gathering session 5**

**Date:** 18<sup>th</sup> July 2-5pm

**Venue:** Balham Library

### **Objective for the workshop**

This session will primarily focus on cost of living issues around Housing and Fuel, to discuss the system issues and options for solutions at a Wandsworth, regional and national level.

The Commission are also interested in how challenges from the cost-of-living crisis are affecting all aspects of resident's lives, in order to gain a comprehensive view of the situation.

The objective of this session is:

- To review evidence on Housing and fuel and begin discussions around the solutions and recommendations for systemic change to support those facing the cost-of-living crisis that the Commission could make in its final report.
- By the end of the session, we are looking to have 3 or 4 key solutions each for Housing and Fuel that the Commission could potentially look into for its final recommendations.

### **Attending the meeting**

- Ian Tattum ( Joint Chair)
- Dorian Leatham ( Joint Chair)
- Cllr Akinola ( Vice Chair)
- Toby Costain
- Cathy Warwick
- Tylor Maria Johnson
- Keziah Gordon
- Tim Lang
- Gillain Norton
- Alex Colas

### **Other attendees**

- Peter Quirk Secretariat
- Alice Addison Secretariat
- Martina Kane Housing and Regeneration Directorate
- Lisa Poole Resources Directorate
- Andrew Hagger Head of Climate Change
- Cllr Dikerdem Cabinet Member for Housing
- Shelter
- National Residential Landlords Association

- Wandsworth Regulatory Services officer ( Private Sector Housing )
- Fuel Poverty Action (online)
- London Rebuilding Society
- Sarah Rackham, Local VCS
- Wandsworth Community Empowerment network

**Written evidence from:**

- Thinking Works, Giles Read
- Ealing Council, Tania Jennings, Principal Domestic Energy Officer, Climate Action, and Sustainability Team

**1. Introduction - Joint Chairs**

- Overview of the Commission, looking at cost of living challenges across four main themes of Food, Housing, Fuel and Transport, from Nov 22 to Autumn 2023 with an aim to set our recommendations for the Council, community, and partners.
- This session will use a workshop model where two groups discuss Housing and Fuel, considering the key issues and options and reviewing potential recommendations
- Update: Interim Report presentation to Wandsworth Finance Committee on 6<sup>th</sup> July went well, this was well-received with positive interest in the final recommendations.

**2. COL programme update – Donovan Ramcharan**

- Progression as presented COL programme update to finance committee on 6<sup>th</sup> July
- Committee agreed to fund the implementation of real living wage by 2026, for all staff working for council and contractors, mission is to be accredited
- Letters for autoenrollment – option to opt out if chosen.
- Recruiting managers to support the programme and make even more positive impact
- Integrating LIFT and using data to increase benefits take up
- Warm spaces into community spaces, energy advice and employment support
- Money hub pilot which involves working intensively with LIFT identified households
- Develop approach moving away from food aid to food trade, work with VCS
- Final point links to Commission evidence which has been listened to and the Programme is now developed a food strategy, looking at food poverty, procurement etc.

**3. Tylor Maria, Policy in Practice: Using LIFT Data as Commission Evidence**

- TM presented a short report highlighting the key areas where data from the Low-Income Family Tracker could be used to evidence the need for certain recommendations. This data however is not exhaustive and only includes those on benefits, typically on the lowest income decile

- Different places more impacted by different means – for example Roehampton faces many issues, but overall, also Tooting etc are areas impacted by different issues.
- May 2023- 1 in 4 of households were in relative poverty, within cohort, 1/10 households not enough income for basic costs.
- LILEEE income- 6500 households' income already below poverty line. Within the cohort, many are living in energy inefficient households. Fuel strand-impact on welfare is high.
- Impact of PRS and households on benefits, first heat map are the houses impacted by LHA, interacts with other measures like the benefit cap- cuts into budget with food

#### 4. Fuel: Discussion Focus Group

Using the resources provided by the secretariat which outlined the evidence collected so far, the options for recommendations and best practice, the group discussed the recommendations and how best we can tackle fuel poverty in Wandsworth.

##### Considering the definition:

**Definition:** *Fuel poverty is the condition by which a household is unable to afford to heat (or cool) their home to an adequate temperature (End Fuel Poverty campaign).*

**National Measure:** *Fuel poverty in England is measured using the Low Income Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE) indicator. Under this indicator, a household is considered to be fuel poor if:*

- *they are living in a property with a fuel poverty energy efficiency rating of band D or below*

*and*

- *when they spend the required amount to heat their home, they are left with a residual income below the official poverty line*

*Before this recent revision you were considered in fuel poverty if you spent +10% on your disposable income on energy.*

- The group discussed the confusion and inconsistency associated with the definition of fuel poverty. The bands are not consistent with the specification of the installation of different energy efficiency models, for example a rogue company may badly install double glazing, and EPCs only identify that a property has double glazing, rather than how well it works.
- The group recognise these definitions and measures, however they also recognised that the priority of the Commission is to find ways to help support those struggling, where the Commission is able to recognise local specific problems.

## Causes and issues

Cause	Issue
Rising energy prices	Fuel Poverty
Low EPC rating –	Higher energy bills - struggling residents unable to pay
Damp & mould	Health issues Social issues Cost of repair

- The group also discussed the above key causes and issues associated with fuel poverty. They recognised that these issues, specifically EPC ratings and energy efficiency measures in households, will require a new workforce with green skills ready to supply the demand for green energy measures, and how this is also associated with reducing fuel costs.
- Another issue discussed was the energy transformation and encouraging and supporting citizens to make the changes to green energy for household needs.
- There are also changing demographics. Crisis support organisations are seeing more people struggling, especially middle-income single people and middle-class pensioners on fixed income struggling. People increasingly run out of money. If we target only people on benefits, squeezed middle get no support.
- Need for the Workforce- consistency and long term of the funding
  - Greens skills and schemes etc
  - Also, GHG funding for local councils needs to be long-term. Councils were getting set up with this funding and went into coalition with others in south west to deliver on bigger scale. However, the funding then ended, and they were unable to carry on, and will have to set it all back up if re-established.
  - There has been reduced support for apprenticeships

## Barriers

- The group discussed some of the key barriers to reducing fuel poverty and improving people's ability to be able to afford to heat their homes.
- These include planning, faculty, bandwidth and how to get funding. For example, churches don't have a route to funding. There are some models such as community shelf, buy shares to build a local energy supply. There could be opportunities to set up separate cooperative, however, need to consider sunk costs. Way of overcoming this. There are some ideas to set up a trial and doing this in areas where fuel poverty is present.

## Solutions

- After identifying the key issues, the group then discussed options for solutions to support people in fuel poverty in Wandsworth and improve the system.

## Long term ideas for further development

1. **Bulk Purchasing scheme:** Research and review options for bulk purchasing schemes. For example, looking into best practice such as the Leicestershire group buying for solar, reviewing buying clubs and looking at private sector purchasing power. Review options, including collective switches to green tariffs, collective LED purchases and collective draught excluder packs. There are many benefits to this approach including cheaper pricing can get those hesitant involved, raises the climate action profile and contributes to a sense of collective action and community spirit.
  - a. Solar Together Leicestershire is an innovative new scheme offering high-quality solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and battery storage. It is a group-buying scheme, which brings Leicestershire households together to get high-quality solar panels at a competitive price, helping you through the process and keeping you informed at every stage. (see resource)
2. **Social Tariffs approach:** Research and review social tariffs approach to provide more targeted support which could be evidenced to be more progressive and more cost-effective in the longer term. (See NEA article on social tariff)
3. **Demand Flexibility Service:** which has been developed to allow the electricity system operator to access additional flexibility when national demand is at its highest.
4. **Examine insurance policy approach** which involves targeted awareness raising for those approaching retirement to do specific energy efficiency improvements to ensure lowers bills during retirement.
5. **Landlord schemes:** Consider approaches where landlords pay their fair share (using ETHER data/Wandsworth data sets)
6. **Low carbon neighbourhoods.**
7. **Council quality mark:** Consider the development of a quality mark from the council, having an awards system on energy efficiency.

### Other:

8. **Sunderland boiler prescribing service** -Pilot project in Sunderland hailed a success with GP and outpatient visits reduced by a third and heating bills cut by £30 a month Family doctors prescribing double glazing and loft insulation for patients living in cold, damp homes. The pilot project in Sunderland found GP and outpatient visits plummeted by a third after patients' homes were made warmer and cheaper to heat to the tune of hundreds of pounds a year. The impact of cold weather on health is estimated to [cost the NHS £1.5bn a year](#) and over [18,000 people died prematurely last winter](#). However, energy bills have soared in recent years, leaving millions of people in fuel poverty and unable to heat their homes properly.
9. **Energy Catapult – Warm Home Prescription** is helping vulnerable people with both cold-sensitive health conditions and low incomes, to stay warm and well at home, and out of hospital – by paying their energy bills over winter. This pilot study aims to determine whether it is more cost-effective overall to

help pay the heating costs of vulnerable people than it is to pay for their health care if they fall ill – saving the NHS money and reducing pressure on frontline staff. An additional benefit of Warm Home Prescription is the ability to identify “hard to reach” homes that are eligible for funding to improve insulation and energy efficiency, cutting running costs and CO2 in the longer term (e.g., via ECO).

10. **London Rebuilding Society**- not for profit equity release
11. **GLA Community Energy**
12. **Telford and Wrekin Energy Guide**
13. **Portsmouth Switched On** – service offer helping through energy and money saving service, first time gas central heating offer, emergency boiler replacement etc.
14. **Norfolk county council package**
15. **Lancashire affordable warmth scheme**
16. **Greater Manchester funding project**
  - The group firstly discussed behaviour changes as a key solution to fuel poverty that can make a big difference at a low cost. This could be supported by detailed and well-developed campaigns from the Council which educate residents on small inexpensive changes that could help people.
  - The group also discussed the need to focus on the poorest households, drawing on the evidence given by end fuel poverty action. This led to discussion on social tariffs. A social tariff is a targeted discount energy deal for qualifying low-income consumers. It is a safety net for eligible households who might be struggling to afford their bills. The National Energy Action has put together a toolkit on social tariffs. One example is London Power/Octopus. These are energy local schemes. There are some barriers, such as linking and matching.
  - Another solution explored was Wandsworth Council installing solar panels on council-owned building and premises, exploiting all opportunities. The energy captured is then fed back into local energy networks. Alongside this, heat pumps are also extremely effective, despite some limitations.

The **final solutions the group** discussed were:

Issue	Solution
Green skills shortage/end to GHG funding	Lobby position- strategy for a transformation plan which includes funding for green skills and is then linked to government funded schemes such as GHG. Further explore green apprenticeships with support and funding.
Energy Prices causing fuel poverty	Pilot a social tariff and energy local schemes
PRS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rogue EPC assessors</li> <li>- Regulation changes not matching delivery</li> </ul>	Better enforcement and quality checking from the Council, including more officers and more support to PRS landlords around energy efficiency and support available <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Retrofit toolkit for PRS</li> <li>- Open Supply Wandsworth to the public</li> </ul>

- Catching social housing specs up.	
Health Issues due to not being able to afford heating	Establish a social prescribing services, for example with boilers, which will increase public health through prevention and create NHS savings. Encourage collaborative working between anchor institutions in order to support people. Increase information sharing to increase uptake of support for those eligible, e.g., through local whatsapp groups
Links to Housing issues:	Increasing enforcement in PRS may affect the sector and landlords within this. This will need to be considered and landlords given adequate support.

### 5. Housing: Discussion Focus Group

Using the resources provided by the secretariat which outlined the evidence collected so far, the options for recommendations and best practice, the group discussed Housing issues in Wandsworth and the solutions that the Commission could consider. Councillor Dikerdem, Cabinet Member for Housing, also attended this session and gave input.

#### Solutions considered and discussed by the group:

- Look at the delivery elements of the housing manifesto /strategy. How could these be developed to support people struggling?
- Build Council Housing (Supported by cabinet member and Shelter)
- Regulating the short-let market (particularly Air B and B)
- Examining different types of right to buy schemes (i.e., buying off private sector)
- Look at planning S 106 real affordable housing
- Lobby industry to build bigger spaces units with more bedrooms for families
- Look at DLO options including work with local suppliers /VCS orgs, e.g., Preston model
- Support older homeowners through using data to target households and support them to take up benefits support etc
- Supporting communities/Civic education/building capacity/bottom up
- Lobby positions London wide; get the regional perspective from GLA
- Better unified voice /lived experience / using VCS as gatekeeper / mining the community knowledge.
- Holistic approach housing and benefits etc

#### What to do – Options for Wandsworth and Government

##### **Council**

Manifesto for housing including mass council housing building project  
Borrowing to build the assets

Co-locating services CA and housing etc  
 Prioritize social housing as a tenure  
 Consider the squeezed middle (cannot afford to rent or buy and receive no benefits, this is a new group of people that are seeking advice, such as working couples of families than need more information and options)

Build or re purpose more affordable homes  
 Provide different solutions focused on different demographics and young people as they are faced with different issues  
 90 day rule - lock in we cannot resolve, a barrier.  
 Shelter argue that building social homes remove home value, allow councils to buy land more easily.  
 Council debt policy  
 Mapping Labour housing manifesto and how this could help those struggling

**Community**  
 Council buying back from the community- Right to buy back  
 Public version of equity release  
 Community working with local orgs doing repairs etc (Preston model)  
 Universal credit taper  
 VSC involved in housing repairs services /resources etc.  
 Having a community resource to support communities  
 Look at behavioural campaign: Persuading people to downsize  
 Impacts on H and WB domestic abuse.

**Regional**  
 Look at planning re size of rooms, mix tenure developments  
 Look at National/ London specific issues in relation to supply and demand?  
 New housing much smaller spaces (only housing for family of two).

**Government**  
 Lobby on LHA frozen since 2020 and benefit cap being removed  
 Funding social housing programme  
 Tax on property wealth  
 Look at structural issues in Whitehall  
 More around discriminatory housing payment  
 Public housing the key 300 m loan (focus on sharpest end)  
 Far more funding from central govt  
 Bursting the property bubble, significant re-alignment of the market

**Tenure**

The group also considered options by tenure .

**Owner older**



Council/Govt equity release approach in order to support downsizing
<b>Mortgaged</b>
<b>Social council</b> Selective licensing scheme SOS.
<b>Council leaseholder</b> Downsizing- look at schemes to sell back to the council. Air B and Bs a problem in leasehold properties
<b>Social/non-council</b>
<b>Homeless</b> Get more info on the trends and scale of the issue in W.
<b>PRS</b> Rent control /regulatory Look at Selective licencing schemes. Tax air B and B / control Selective licensing scheme SOS

### Summary of the preferred options : Feedback session

- Prioritisation of building Council housing yet recognised there is a squeezed middle who also need support as they aren't eligible for social housing but can't buy their own house and also cannot afford to rent with high rents in Wandsworth. Most people are in PRS at the moment can't afford the rent. Therefore, there is a need for dedicated lobbying for LHA in terms of where rents are, which pushes LHA to come towards what rents now are.
- Renters reform bill- changes to housing
- Long term- price of housing to go down and the effects of this
- Rent controls- no evidence to show rent control works, but some disagreement. More landlords will sell.
  - Energy is part of the infrastructure of housing. Sewage water food infrastructure etc. Commission not addressing wider infrastructure.

The workshop closed at 17:00.