

## **Wandsworth Cost of Living Commission: 4th evidence gathering session: Systems Thinking**

**Date:** 26 June 2023 at 14:00 –17:00

**Venue:** Earlsfield Library

### **Attendees:**

- Ian Tattum - Joint Chair
- Dorian Leatham - Joint Chair
- Councillor Kemi Akinola - Vice Chair
- Toby Costin
- Lauren James
- Professor Tim Lang
- Tylor Maria Johnson
- Gillian Norton
- Cathy Warwick

### **Wandsworth Council officers**

- Peter Quirk: Secretariat
- Alice Addison: Secretariat

### **Commissioner apologies**

- Kath McDonnell
- Alex Colas
- Beverley Corson
- Keziah Gordon
- Arshad Daud

### **Objective for this session**

This session will primarily focus on cost-of-living issues through the lens of systems thinking, to provide the opportunity to tease out system issues, barriers and opportunities at Wandsworth, regional and national level.

We 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 gain a picture of the Wandsworth system, and gather ideas, solutions and recommendations for systemic change to support those facing the cost of living crisis.

### **New Local: Grace Pollard & Imran Hashmi - Designing Out Hardship Report**

- This is a research program organised by a network of councils and organisations, peer learning etc.

Designing Out the Most Severe Forms of Hardship in Local Areas Report

- The main focus is about understanding local approaches to tackling and preventing poverty and destitution, share learning etc.

#### Approaches

- Call for learning and ideas- this was a light touch approach for anyone working in local organisations that address poverty could get involved. Key message was simple, around the energy and innovation right now.
- The approach included interviews, a series of participatory workshops invited different groups to workshop together, opportunity to look at problems- useful to bring together range of people, they could think differently about long-term solutions
- There is a recognition that across VCS and orgs there's lots of crucial work already happening.

#### Areas:

1. Community lead activity and capacity
2. Capacity building- asset based community development
3. Increasing community participation in wider local action particularly to tackle poverty- Poverty truth commissions, examples in report Trafford poverty truth commission.
4. Areas of opportunity- existing network of orgs giving advice on issues, support from services indirectly and directly, housing providers, mental health, employment support

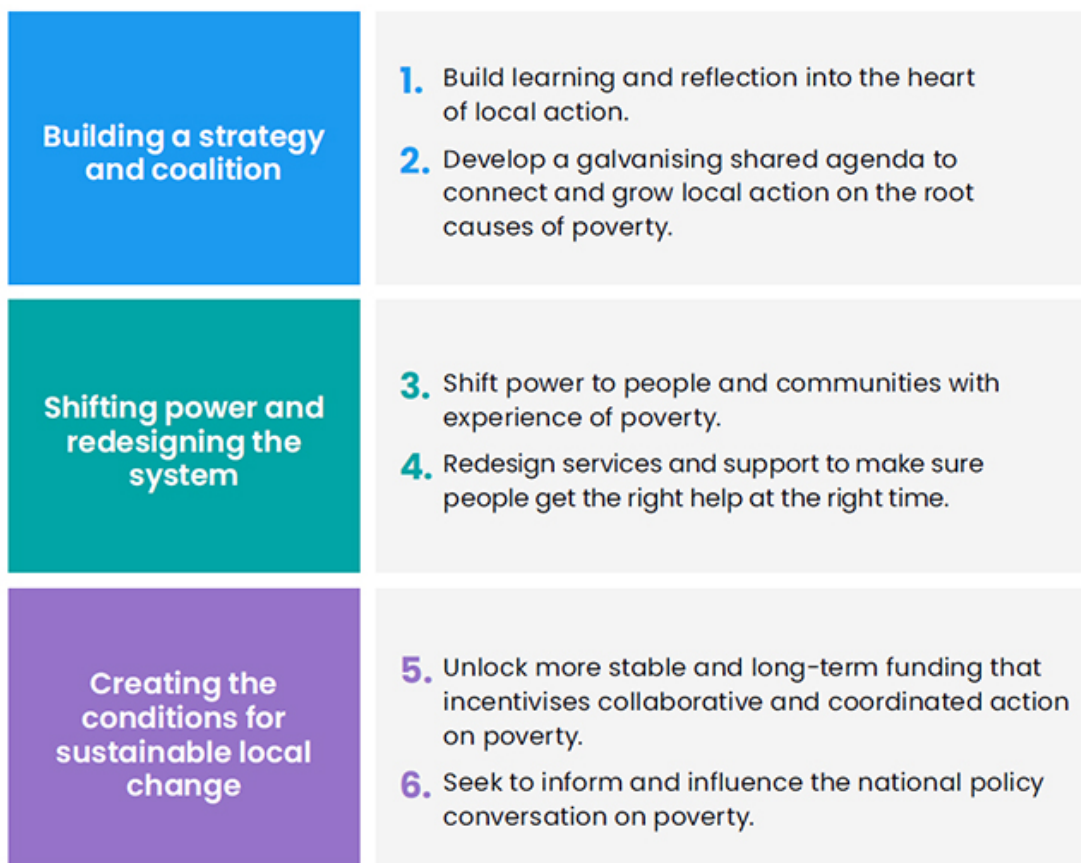
#### Barriers in the system - identified 4 key ones

- Limited local powers- significant policy levers sit with national policy makers
- Funding streams- meeting local priorities is challenging with lack of joined up working
- Lack of time and resources to develop local system wide agenda- people exhausted and overwhelmed after covid
- Gap between ambition and reality- plenty of people championing ways to shift power to communities, often lack of time, strategic alignment, performance and accountability measures are the barriers

#### Framework

- Build local framework- one key finding was the recognition that local work is already happening, don't need new temporary project but rather communities need time and space to build on already happening work.
- Written from perspective of all partners rather than particular organisation
- Not a blueprint, but can help guide what we need to do in the report

#### 3 key themes six key actions



### Sam Ashton, London Councils

- London GLA research shows higher inflation, driven by higher housing costs, key systems challenge in London is housing. National gov support is around energy and food, but support for housing is lacking.
- One way to monitor is GLA monthly poll of Londoners- 22% Londoners define themselves as financially struggling, highest number in a year.
- Wholesale energy costs will fall but this may not translate into lower costs from households
- What's worked well? COLC quickly came post-covid, many structures for support were still in place, helped support work at pan-london level and stronger relationship between LAs and VCS
- London partnership – chaired by Cllr Gould – GLA, VCS, key institution at pan London level, made the recent decision that COL would be main focus. Pan london campaign- led by GLA and London councils, pension credit take up- think about where systems sit at pan-london level. Explore other benefits, such as social tariffs, use data to identify the households in need.

### System barriers

- Key ones- data sharing, e.g. design of the household support fund, barrier in sharing of data for example hospital giving support.
- Resources and skills- VCS struggle to recruit

- Cost of living crisis – intensification of existing structural issues in Wandsworth- crisis support is not systemic
- Way that the COL crisis needs to be solved is looking at structural problems- housing.

### **Spencer Barnshaw, Trades Union Representative, secretary of BWTC**

- Conglomerate of unions who come together from across the borough. Represent approx 20,000 working people across borough, and although good engagement, do not engage with all.
- Wandsworth is a borough divided among class, race etc, structural poverty is a larger problem and is ongoing. Crisis support is necessary because people have fallen through nets- cost of living increased. For example, Wandsworth prison system is not sustainable, the prison officers can't afford to live here, can't afford now to drive here, unsociable hours and no public transport.
- Starting point to think about is people in work who are experiencing poverty.
- Paying and supporting trade union recognition is key, for example, getting into Apple and encouraging all employers to recognise unions, pay higher if people member of unions.

### **Imogen Spencer, Engagement Manager for Wandsworth/Merton, SW ICB**

- Integrated care system in SWL is about one year old and its work is more integrated with partners, LA, VCS, Social care, lots of scope and working out how to do this through system or locally, is big challenge.
- Normalisation of the example of foodbanks is a problem. Great to understand that people need food, however this is not going to be the only thing they need. Food poverty likely means all kinds of poverty.
- Keyways that ICB piloting to work as new ICS is working out how to support other partners, stakeholders, VCS through community engagement, this is challenge.

### **T.S, Wandsworth Citizens Advice**

- Wandsworth CA is an action org, independent charity, free advice, local level, work and partnership
- March- numbers has plateaued but still at historic high
- Working people not eligible for benefits are often penalised as they aren't eligible, however working households not able to budget on what they have got.
- Pension credit- personal independence payment and other benefits are now being missed because of waiting periods. Majority of people don't know what they might be entitled to - making people aware of what they are entitled to would be a huge help.
- Deal with food poverty- encouraging and educating people about what they can do, involving communities to educate them how they can maximise their food purchasing, give tools.

### **Recommendations**

- Wandsworth not a single place- Roehampton is very distinct of its needs and challenges. Problem is need to have different headings for different places.
- Talk a lot about energy efficiency in private housing, but also social housing, limited levers locally but this is done locally
- Funding- current issues going on for 12 years not 12 months. Increasing reports of CA staff using foodbanks, difficulty recruiting, pay enough, issue with the way that VCS is funded, WBC good funder but whole model of VCS needs change.

What council can do – cost neutral, way we do things

- Council tax - adopt the council tax protocol
- Single view of debt- evidence is makes a difference for residents, but easier for council staff, easier and right thing to do
- Last recommendation- principles when designing systems, council have had to design new ways of who and how to provide support- involve the VCS earlier, work together to communicate clearly what's happening to residents.

#### **Charlotte White, Earlsfield Foodbank**

- The need is not going down, it is only plateauing. There is a high amount of people in crisis, to the extent of calling 999. There is a build-up of problems over winter. Debt, both debt and informal which can contribute to family breakdowns and other issues include housing, private landlords putting up rents.
- Working poverty -There are double barriers, people can't afford food but can't access services.
- Need early intervention with leaflets. Recommend campaigning hard to end need for food banks.
- Employer practices often cause insecure hours and low wages, short notice shift cancellations, supermarkets bad practice, supermarkets to blame for normalisation of food banks.
- Digital inclusivity, support given but people can't access spaces to get online. People not engaged with the system.
- There is widespread concern about what next winter will look like. Support- essentials guarantee, need to have a base for benefits, but not going far enough.

#### **Louise Pendry, Bounce, community interest company**

- Hear about household situation as an arts company, disconnect that people come and don't feel they have that support elsewhere, so come to Bounce for crisis support. Knock-on effect for cultural organisations. Health another issues area, only a hot meal at the café.
- Need better connections- listening to people about housing situations, people don't know where to go, support for VCS, not infrastructure in VCS or NHS to support crisis situations. Having to act a different purpose. People particularly isolated, affects serious mental health issues.

#### **Amelia Willis, VSC Development Manager**

- Works closely with VCS
- Independent needs analysis of VCS is taking place and there is communication between PQ/AA to link up feedback, linking in to work and timescales for evaluation.
- Need analysis- workshops bringing together officers, VCS, health, interviews, surveys etc, what worked well and what hasn't.

**Donovan Ramcharan, COL Programme Update**

- 8 workstreams, £5m funding reserve, 44 projects so far
- Latest info updated next Committee paper 6<sup>th</sup> July.
- Highlights- approval for further 7 projects focusing on COL support, including looking at a food strategy