

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD
Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Agenda

Date Tuesday 19 January 2021

Time 6.00 pm

Venue Virtual Meeting
https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/200608/meetings/1940/live_council_meetings_online

- Notes
1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST- If a Member requires advice on any item involving a possible declaration of interest which could affect his/her ability to speak and/or vote he/she is advised to contact Paul Entwistle or Constitutional Services at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting.
 2. CONTACT OFFICER for this agenda is Constitutional Services email constitutional.services@oldham.gov.uk
 3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS - Any Member of the public wishing to ask a question at the above meeting can do so only if a written copy of the question is submitted to the contact officer by 12 noon on Thursday, 14 January 2021.
 4. This meeting will be recorded for live and/or subsequent broadcast on the Council's website. The whole of the meeting will be recorded, except where there are confidential or exempt items and the footage will be on our website. This activity promotes democratic engagement in accordance with Section 100A(9) of the Local Government Act 1972. The cameras will focus on the proceedings of the meeting.

Recording and reporting the Council's meetings is subject to the law including the law of defamation, the Human Rights Act, the Data Protection Act and the law on public order offences.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Councillors McLaren (Chair), Taylor, Toor, Jacques, Curley, Price (Vice-Chair), Surjan and Williamson

Item No

- | | |
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| 3 | Urgent Business (Pages 1 - 30) |
| | Urgent business, if any, introduced by the Chair |
| 10 | Homelessness Strategy 2021 (Pages 31 - 32) |
| 11 | Poverty (Pages 33 - 70) |



Oldham
Council



Corporate Complaints Policy

Draft January 2021

Corporate Complaints Policy

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Oldham Council recognises the importance of complaints and welcomes them as a valuable form of feedback about our services and those delivered by third party providers on our behalf. We want our customers to be satisfied with our services. We welcome hearing our customers' comments, compliments and complaints to better understand how customers view our services and to use these valuable opportunities to learn and improve for the future.
- 1.2 In setting out this policy, we recognise customers' rights to be heard, understood and respected. We will ensure that you are treated fairly, openly, honestly, consistently and appropriately in accordance with our co-operative values.

2.0 Purpose of the policy

- 2.1 The aim of this policy is to provide a fair and consistent approach to dealing with all expressions of dissatisfaction and to ensure they are handled appropriately and professionally in a manner that upholds the principles of good complaints handling as set out by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).
- 2.2 Emphasis will be placed on resolving complaints as quickly as possible by the service concerned. We will ensure that staff are equipped to deal with complaints efficiently and effectively and lessons learned from complaint investigations will be used to directly inform service improvements.

3.0 What is a complaint?

- 3.1 The following definition is provided by the LGSCO.

'A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service, whether the action was taken or the service provided by the Council itself or a person or body acting on behalf of the Council.'

- 3.2 Complaints may, for example, be about
 - The fairness or professionalism of interaction with employees
 - Failure to do something we should have done
 - Refusal to provide a service or delivery of poor service
 - Failure to follow the correct policy or procedure
 - An observation about our services or people which requires action
 - A suggestion about how things can be improved
 - Any feedback that is not complimentary
- 3.3 The majority of issues can be successfully resolved at the point of service delivery. Services should be pro-active in communicating directly with customers and working together to address any issues as they arise. We ask customers to contact the service concerned before submitting a formal

complaint as this may enable the service to put things right or resolve an issue for the customer who would want the matter swiftly resolved.

- 3.4 Complaints cannot be dealt with under the Corporate Complaints Policy if they are dealt with according to a different internal or statutory requirement. These include
- Adult Social Care complaints
 - Children's Social Care complaints
 - Complaints about a school or education provision
- 3.5 The following would not be dealt with under the Council's complaints procedure
- An initial request for a service (this is generally the first contact from a customer to ask that a service be considered or carried out)
 - Requests for information (these will be dealt with by the Information Management Team according to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or Data Protection Act 2018 and accompanying policies, depending on the nature of the request. NB Where there is a crossover of issues the Complaints Team and Information Management Team will work together to resolve).
 - Employee grievances
 - Matters that would more appropriately be dealt with by an insurer
 - Matters subject to a legal right to appeal or review
 - Matters relating to court proceedings, or other legal proceedings, or investigations by other appropriate bodies e.g. the Police
 - Matters upon which a Court, Tribunal or Appeal body has already ruled, or is in the process of considering
 - Complaints that have been previously withdrawn by the customer
 - Complaints about Elected Member conduct (these will be dealt with in accordance with the standard's procedures)
 - A complaint that has already been investigated and a final response has been issued
 - Where the issues involved are covered by the Council's disciplinary policy
 - Where the grounds of the complaint are unclear, frivolous or vexatious (Please note the process to manage unreasonable complaints or unreasonably persistent and abusive customers is set out separately in the Unreasonable Behaviour Policy).
- 3.6 We will normally only accept complaints made within **12 months** of the issue(s) giving rise to the complaint, or within 12 months of the customer being made aware of the issue(s). However, if there are exceptional reasons provided by the customer for the delay in submitting the complaint, the Council may make a discretionary decision to consider the matter.
- 3.7 If for any reason we decide not to deal with a complaint under this policy, we will provide an explanation of that decision in writing.

4.0 Who can make a complaint?

- 4.1 Anybody in receipt of services provided directly by the Council (or third parties conducting activity on behalf of the Council) or their representative can make a complaint directly to the Council. This includes complaints made via an Elected Member of the Council or Member of Parliament or other elected official.
- 4.2 Where a complaint is received from a representative of a service user, the Council may request completion of a form of authority to indicate that the representative has permission to act on their behalf. This ensures compliance with Data Protection requirements and that the customer's wishes are being fulfilled.

5.0 Anonymous complaints

- 5.1 We understand that sometimes people find it difficult to make a complaint. Where complaints are received anonymously, the Council will try to take as much information as is possible from the customer to ensure an investigation can be carried out. A decision will be made on a case by case basis about whether it is possible or appropriate to consider anonymous complaints.
- 5.2 If a customer does not provide us with a contact name or address or email address, it will not be possible for us to reply with the outcome of the investigation. However, on most occasions anonymous complaints will be brought to the attention of the relevant service for consideration.

6.0 Equalities and Diversity and reasonable adjustments

- 6.1 When implementing this policy, we will have regard to the Equalities Act 2020 and show due regard to an individual's medical condition or vulnerability such as mental health and learning disabilities. We will help and support customers to overcome any difficulties in pursuing their complaint for example, suggesting advocacy support where this may be helpful or helping to ensure language barriers are overcome. Any support or adjustment made will be determined on a case by case basis and with the agreement of the customer.

7.0 How can a complaint be made

- 7.1 A key priority of the Council is to improve the efficiency of communication with our customers and online systems are useful in helping to achieve this aim. We ask our customers to submit any feedback or complaint in the first instance via the online form (compliments and comments about services can also be submitted using this link) https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/200143/complaints_and_feedback/630/complaints_or_feedback_about_the_council.
- 7.2 Where this is not possible, complaints can be made by email customer.feedback@oldham.gov.uk

- 7.3 Complaints can also be submitted by post to The Complaints Team, PO Box 33, Civic Centre, West Street, Oldham OL1 1UG.
- 7.4 The Complaints Team offers a predominantly digital service. However, for vulnerable adults, children and young people who are unable to access online services, the team operate a telephone message and call back service, which is available on 0161 770 8122.
- 7.5 Customers are requested to provide any relevant supporting evidence/ documentation at the time of making the complaint in order that the issues raised can be fully investigated.
- 7.6 Customers sometimes make contact about Council services on social media e.g. via the Council's Twitter or Facebook accounts. Details of this contact is forwarded to the relevant service by the Communications Team to determine if the contact should be treated as a request for service or handled as a complaint. If the contact should be treated as a complaint, the service will ensure that the complaints team is made aware and the complaint will be handled offline and in keeping with this policy.

8.0 What a customer can expect

- 8.1 Customers can expect to receive a consistently high-quality service when they contact any member of staff with a complaint and we will deal with all complaints promptly, respectfully and efficiently.
- 8.2 Where complaints cover multiple issues and several different service areas, we will normally provide customers with a single response. We may ask customers to agree a statement of complaint to ensure we have fully understood all the issues they would like us to consider.
- 8.3 If multiple complaints include issues relating to areas covered by other complaints legislation e.g. Adult Social Care, then those complaints must be managed separately.
- 8.4 Customers can expect to be asked for supporting evidence or additional information where it is felt this is required to complete a robust investigation. Customers will be provided with a timeframe in which to provide the evidence/ information. If the necessary evidence/ information is not provided to enable an investigation to be completed, the complaint may be placed on hold until the Council has enough information to enable it to investigate fully.
- 8.5 Where customers fail to engage with the complaints process and refuse to provide the necessary information to complete a complaint investigation, the Council may treat the complaint as withdrawn.

9.0 Timescales

- 9.1 Customers will receive an e-acknowledgement of their complaint as soon as it is submitted by email or via the online form.

- 9.2 The timescales for dealing with most corporate complaints is 20 working days. If the matters at hand are complex, the council may need to extend this timescale and will inform the customer of this.
- 9.3 In complex cases, the Complaints Team may send customers a statement of complaint to agree before arranging for an investigation to take place (this is a summary of the issues the team believes the customer has raised in their complaint and is sent to ensure all issues are understood and captured).
- 9.4 In complex cases, the Complaints Team will also make an assessment about the likely timescales for investigating and responding to the complaint. The team will consider a range of factors to determine whether timescales should be increased, such as the number of issues raised, the severity of those issues, the resources needed to investigate the complaint and the support required to help the customer pursue the complaint to a conclusion. If timescales need to be increased, an explanation as to why will be provided to customers by telephone or in writing. The Council will always try to resolve a complaint as quickly as possible.
- 9.5 Once the complaint has been investigated, a response will normally be sent to the complaint by email or letter. Where it is felt a meeting or telephone call would best address the issues, this will be discussed with the customer and the Complaints Team will establish whether a follow-up letter or email is required to confirm the outcome of the discussions.
- 9.6 The complaint will be closed once the response has been provided to the customer.
- 9.7 The Council operates a one stage complaints procedure, and after the response is received, the customer has the right to contact the LGSCO should they disagree with the outcome. However, the Council is keen to resolve issues locally where this is possible. Therefore, if the customer is unhappy with the response to their complaint for one of the following reasons, they can ask the Council to complete a review of the response:
- Key issues raised as part of their complaint have not been addressed
 - They have become aware of fundamental evidence which may affect the outcome
 - The Council has misunderstood the basis of their complaint
- 9.8 If upon reviewing the information provided by the customer, the Council feels that the criteria in paragraph 9.7 is met, and that further investigation/ consideration of the matters may lead to an alternative outcome, it will re-open the complaint. A further response will then be issued to the customer.
- 9.9 If the Council feels that the criteria outlined in paragraph 9.7 is not met, and that no further investigation into the complaint will allow it to reach an alternative conclusion, the customer will be reminded of their right to

take their complaint to the LGSCO should they wish to take their complaint further.

10.0 Third Party complaints

- 10.1 Where the Council receives a complaint relating to work carried out by a third party it has commissioned to provide services on its behalf, it will acknowledge receipt of these automatically if submitted via email or the online form.
- 10.2 Details of the complaint will be recorded on the Council's complaints database.
- 10.3 In order for the matters to be investigated, the Council will need to share the details of the complaint with the third-party organisation and will inform the customer of this.
- 10.4 The third party will normally lead the investigation into the complaint and provide a response where there are no internal Council services involved in the matter complained about.
- 10.5 The Council will ask to be sent a copy of the third party's investigation report or response to the complaint and this will be recorded on the Council's complaints database. Where appropriate, the Council may ask the third party to undertake additional enquiries or amend the response should it feel the complaint has not been appropriately addressed.

11.0 The role of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

- 11.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) looks at individual complaints about Councils and some other organisations providing local public services. It also investigates complaints about all adult social care providers (including care homes and home care agencies) for people who self-fund their care.
- 11.2 If customers have been through all stages of the Council's complaints procedure and are still unhappy, they can ask the LGSCO to review their complaint. The Ombudsman investigates complaints in a fair and independent way - it does not take sides. It is a free service.
- 11.3 The Ombudsman expects customers to have given the Council the opportunity to deal with their complaint before contacting them. If customers have not heard from the Council within a reasonable time, the Ombudsman may decide to investigate their complaint anyway; this is usually up to 12 weeks.
- 11.4 Contact details for the LGSCO are:
Website: www.lgo.org.uk
Telephone: 0300 061 0614

12.0 Remedies

- 12.1 The Council will offer appropriate remedy and redress, in accordance with guidance provided by the LGSCO.
- 12.2 The general principle is that, as far as possible, customers should be put in the position they would have been in, had things not gone wrong.
- 12.3 Examples of remedies include:
- An apology
 - Delivery of the service required
 - A change of procedures to prevent a recurrence of the incident
 - Financial compensation where appropriate
- 12.4 The service will agree the proposed remedy before a response is issued to the customer. Where agreement cannot be reached between the Complaints Manager and the Head of Service about a remedy, this will be escalated to the relevant Director for a final decision.

13.0 Withdrawal of complaints

- 13.1 Customers may decide to withdraw their complaint verbally or by email or letter. We will confirm the withdrawal of the complaint by email or letter. In some instances, the Council may continue to investigate the matter internally.

14.0 Monitoring and Performance

- 14.1 The monitoring and review of complaints gives valuable information about customer perception and service performance and helps to identify areas for organisational learning from complaints to drive service improvement.
- 14.2 Quarterly monitoring of complaints handling and resolution will be reported to Senior Managers and Members. (NB COVID-19 has impacted complaints handling by the Council and also by the LGSCO. The Council's website has been updated to reflect this disruption).
- 14.3 An annual report will also be produced on the overall performance of complaints across the Council and presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

15.0 Review of policies

- 15.1 The Complaints Policy and Unreasonable Behaviour Policy will be published on www.oldham.gov.uk These policies will be reviewed annually (or as a change is required). The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Green has delegated authority to agree these changes in consultation with the Director of Finance.



Unreasonable Behaviour Policy

A guide to the management of abusive or persistent customers and complainants

Draft January 2021

Unreasonable Behaviour Policy

Section A Introduction and Purpose of the policy

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy has been produced to create a joint understanding of what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behaviour from our residents, businesses and members of the public (hereafter referred to as Customers /you) in dealing with Employees of Oldham Council, Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), The Unity Partnership Ltd and Miocare (Employees/we) and Elected Members of the Council (Members). The policy is set out for reference for Customers, including those who have submitted a formal complaint, Employees and Members and also for external bodies such as the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).
- 1.2 In setting out this policy, we recognise a Customer's right to be heard, understood and respected. We will ensure that you are treated fairly, openly, honestly, consistently and appropriately in accordance with our co-operative values. We are keen to work with our Customers to resolve issues at an early stage to achieve the best outcomes for all.

2.0 Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of the policy is:
- To define behaviours that are not acceptable and are deemed unreasonable including behaviour by Customers who make frivolous, persistent or vexatious complaints against Employees or Members
 - To ensure that the ability of an Employee or Member to conduct business is not adversely affected by those few Customers who behave in an unreasonable manner
 - To ensure that Employees and Members have a safe working environment and are not exposed to unnecessary stress due to the unacceptable behaviour of Customers
 - To empower Employees and Members to deal confidently and effectively with unreasonable behaviour in the small number of cases where this occurs
 - To set out a clear process about how unreasonable behaviour will be managed
- 2.2 Employees and Members operate in public life and their standards of behaviour should reflect the 7 principles of public life¹. These principles equally apply to elected representatives and those working in and delivering public services. When implementing this policy, you can expect us to respond to you in ways that demonstrate these principles. The

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>

principles and how we will demonstrate these in terms of this policy are set out below

Table 1: Our standards of behaviour

Principle of Public Life	Examples of our standards of behaviour in the execution of the Unreasonable Behaviour Policy
Selflessness	We will act in the public interest
Integrity	<p>We will act with integrity e.g. we will avoid placing ourselves under any obligation to those seeking inappropriately to influence us in our work.</p> <p>We will declare and resolve any conflict of interests and relationships.</p> <p>We will treat you with dignity and respect</p>
Objectivity	We will take decisions impartially, fairly and will use evidence to make decisions without discrimination or bias.
Accountability	<p>We are accountable for the decisions we make.</p> <p>We will set a date to review the decisions we have made to ensure we do not apply open ended restrictions on contact.</p>
Openness	<p>This policy is available online and will be issued to you with letters setting out any action taken under this policy.</p> <p>We will follow this policy when making decisions.</p> <p>We will explain to you why we have acted under this policy.</p>
Honesty	We will be honest in making decisions under this policy

Leadership	<p>We will challenge and take action where we experience unreasonable behaviour</p> <p>We will be clear, balanced and professional in our dealings with you.</p> <p>We will follow our policies and procedures in addressing our own behaviour where it falls short of these principles.</p>
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2.3 We have a duty to protect Employees and Members and recognise our obligations to Customers. When allegations are made against Employees, we will carry out appropriate investigations in accordance with our internal policies and procedures. Complaints against Members will be dealt with in accordance with the standards procedures.

2.4 We do not tolerate offensive, threatening, abusive or other forms of unacceptable behaviour. Under these circumstances, we will take appropriate action to protect the health and wellbeing of Employees, Members and the integrity of our processes and business.

3.0 Who does this policy apply to?

3.1 This policy applies to all Customers including those who have submitted a formal complaint to us. It also applies to advocates/advocacy services acting on behalf of Customers.

4.0 When can the policy be invoked?

4.1 This policy will normally be invoked on the basis that unreasonable behaviour has taken place over a period of time. However, in exceptional circumstances, the policy will be invoked following a single incident if this incident of unreasonable, unacceptable or vexatious behaviour merits immediate action.

4.2 Subject to the exception set out in paragraph 4.1, a decision to invoke this policy must be made based on documented evidence (examples are outlined in 17.2). The evidence should demonstrate that a resident’s unreasonable, unacceptable, frivolous or vexatious behaviour has taken place over a period of time. A period of time is not defined in this policy but can include a high incidence of unreasonable contact over a short period of time or a history of unreasonable behaviour over a longer timeframe.

5.0 Equalities and Diversity and reasonable adjustments

5.1 When implementing the policy, we will have regard to the Equalities Act 2020 and show due regard to an individual’s medical condition or vulnerability such as mental health and learning disabilities, as and when applicable. Any restrictions imposed on Customer contact will recognise and be appropriate to the circumstances.

6.0 Support for Employees

- 6.1 We will act quickly to ensure that our Employees have a safe working environment (actions are set out in Section D).
- 6.2 Support is available for Employees who are affected by unreasonable or abusive behaviour from Customers or complainants. The Employee Assistance Programme(EAP) offers free counselling support 24/7. Further details are available on the Council's intranet
- 6.2 Advice can also be obtained from the Complaints Manager about the management of Customer behaviour.

Section B Recognising Unreasonable Behaviour

7.0 What behaviour is unreasonable?

- 7.1 We understand that when you contact us, you may have reason to feel angry, aggrieved, upset or distressed.
- 7.2 We do not view assertive behaviour (for example putting your case forward in a persuasive manner) as unreasonable. However, we will manage behaviour that is aggressive, rude or abusive or which places unreasonable demands on Employees or Members.
- 7.3 Unreasonable behaviour is behaviour or language, whether face to face, by telephone, social media or written that may cause staff or councillors to feel intimidated, threatened or abused. Examples may include:
- Threats
 - Verbal abuse
 - Racist and sexist language
 - Derogatory remarks
 - Offensive language
 - Rudeness
 - Making inflammatory statements
 - Raising unsubstantiated allegations
- 7.4 Whilst we accept that those in contact with us may feel angry, it is not considered acceptable when that anger becomes aggression directed towards Employees or Members.
- 7.5 Verbal and online abuse, threats, harassment or physical violence against Employees or Members will not be tolerated and will be reported to the police, who may decide to prosecute.

8.0 Unreasonable requests

- 8.1 Requests may be considered unreasonable by the nature and scale of service expected. Examples may include:
- Requesting responses within unreasonable timescales
 - Insisting on speaking with specific Employees or Members
 - Adopting a "capture-all" approach by contacting Employees, Members and/or other third parties
 - Making repeated and unnecessary contact during the investigation of a complaint
- 8.2 We recognise that our resources, including time, must be used where they can be most effective. This might mean that we cannot respond to every issue in the way a Customer would like, if in doing so it would take up a disproportionate amount of time and resources that could be used elsewhere to support the most vulnerable in our community.
- 8.3 We ask you to recognise that due to volume of work we deal with that we may not be able to respond immediately to your requests. This does not

mean that your concerns are not important to us. If we have asked for your patience but you continue to pursue your concerns, we may consider such behaviour to be unreasonable.

9.0 Unreasonable Communication

9.1 Communication may be considered unreasonable where Customers:

- Continually contact us while we are in the process of investigating their concerns
- Make several approaches about the same matter without raising new issues
- Refuse to accept a decision made where explanations for the decision have been given
- Continue to pursue complaints /issues which we have reviewed and consider to have no substance
- Continue to pursue complaints/issues which have already been investigated and determined
- Continue to raise unfounded or new complaints arising from the same set of facts
- Continue to raise unfounded or new complaints about us on social media without giving us the opportunity to deal with these issues directly with you and through the normal channels
- Use threatening or abusive language
- Send large volumes of irrelevant documentation

10.0 How will we manage unreasonable behaviour?

10.1 We have a zero-tolerance position on violence and threats against Employees and Members and this behaviour will always be reported to the Police.

10.2 Employees and Members have the right to terminate telephone conversations where Customers are behaving unreasonably, aggressively or abusively.

10.3 Employees and Members have the right to take steps to protect their own safety if they feel threatened in a face to face encounter with a Customer. Examples of these steps include contacting the Police to remove you from our premises or applying a ban to prevent you visiting our premises in future.

10.4 We may decide to restrict communications with you if you do not modify your behaviour. If we do restrict communication with you, we will consider which is the most appropriate and proportionate approach to take. We will consider options in consideration of the nature, extent and impact of your behaviour on our ability to do our work.

10.5 We will be transparent and explain to you what restriction we are putting in place, our reasons for doing so and how long the restriction will apply. The restrictions we may apply are set out in Section D of this policy.

11.0 Definition of Unreasonable Behaviour and Unreasonably Persistent Complaints

11.1 We have adopted the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO)² definition of unreasonable behaviour and unreasonably persistent complaints;

'Unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants are those complainants who, because of the nature or frequency of their contacts with an organisation, hinder the organisation's consideration of their, or other people's, complaints.'

12.0 Features of unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complaints

12.1 Features of unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complaints include the following

N.B this list is not exhaustive, nor does one example necessarily imply that the person will be considered as being in this category

- Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of help
- Refusing to cooperate with the complaints' investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- Having insufficient or no grounds for their complaint and making the complaint only to annoy/ cause inconvenience (or for reasons that the complainant does not admit or make obvious)
- Refusing to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure or that the issues are not within our power to investigate, change or influence e.g. where the issue is the responsibility of another organisation
- Insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice e.g. insisting that there must be no written record of the complaint
- Making unjustified complaints about Employees who are trying to deal with the issues and seeking to have them replaced or dismissed
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Denying or changing statements made at an earlier stage.
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant new information at a later stage and requiring that the complaint is investigated again
- Raising many detailed but unimportant questions, and insisting they are all answered
- Submitting falsified documents from themselves or others.

² <https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/guidance-notes/guidance-on-managing-unreasonable-complainant-behaviour>

- Adopting a 'scatter gun' approach, for example pursuing the same complaint or complaints with various Employees and Members at the same time as with a Member of Parliament or other external bodies, requiring us to use multiple resources to deal with enquiries when resources could be better used to investigate and respond to the initial complaint
- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails to numerous council staff, or detailed letters every few days, and expecting immediate responses.
- Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints.
- Electronically recording meetings and conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other person involved
- Refusing to accept the decision; repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.
- Harassing or verbally abusing or otherwise seeking to intimidate Employees or Members dealing with their complaint by using foul or inappropriate language, including racist, sexist and other offensive language
- Complaining about an issue based on a historic and irreversible decision or incident
- Persistently arguing the same point, asking us to change records, information or decisions when we have already explained our position
- Combining some or all of these features or persisting in behaviour that has the intention or impact of causing harassment to Members or Employees

Section C: Formal complaints and unreasonable behaviour

13.0 Unreasonable behaviour by a Customer making a formal complaint

- 13.1 Dealing with a complaint should be a straightforward process but in a minority of cases, Customers pursue their complaints in a way which can either impede the investigation of their complaint or can have significant resource issues for us. This can happen while the complaint is being investigated or after we have finished dealing with the complaint.
- 13.2 We are committed to dealing with complaints fairly, comprehensively and in a timely manner.
- 13.3 We will not normally limit the contact with Customers who make a complaint but we do expect that our Employees and Members are treated respectfully. This applies to verbal, written or face to face contact. Unreasonable behaviour is set out in Section B of this policy and applies to Customers including those who are making a complaint.
- 13.4. We will act to protect Employees and Members from unreasonable behaviour in accordance with this policy.
- 13.5 Raising legitimate concerns or criticisms of a complaints procedure as it progresses, for example if agreed timescales are not met, should not in itself lead to someone being regarded as an unreasonably persistent complainant.
- 13.6 Similarly, the fact that a complainant is unhappy with the outcome of a complaint and seeks to challenge it once or more than once, should not necessarily cause him or her to be labelled unreasonably persistent.

14.0 Deciding the course of action to be taken

- 14.1 While we cannot spend excessive time in dealing with unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complaints, we will also try to avoid inflaming an already difficult situation.
- 14.2 It may be worth spending some time defusing a situation, rather than taking a hard line and then spending more time holding that position. The best way of handling a situation will be a matter of judgement and should be considered in the first instance by the service manager. Support and advice is also available from the Complaints Manager.
- 14.3 If a decision is made that the complaint is unreasonable and will not be dealt with under the complaints procedure or will not be progressed to the next stage, this decision will be clearly communicated to the complainant and reasons given.
- 14.4 In some cases, relations between us and unreasonable complainants break down while complaints are under investigation and there is little prospect of achieving a satisfactory outcome. In these cases, there may be little purpose in following all the stages of the complaints' procedure.

Where this occurs, the relevant Ombudsman may be prepared to consider a complaint before the procedure has run its course.

15.0 What happens if we then receive complaints about the same matter?

- 15.1 If the complaint is essentially about the same matter and no different information or very minor differences have been presented to us
- If the complainant has not exhausted our complaints procedure, then the complaint will go to the next stage of the relevant complaints' procedure.
 - If the complainant has exhausted the complaints procedure but has not been referred to the LGSCO or other relevant Ombudsman or the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the complainant will be referred there.
 - If the complainant disagrees with the decision of the LGSCO, ICO or other relevant body, they will be referred there
 - If the complainant continues to contact us on the same matter, then we will explain that we will not enter into further correspondence on the matter and that further correspondence will be read and filed but that no further action will be taken
- 15.2 Sometimes, we are presented with further complaints about similar matters that are slightly different from the original complaint but about the same broad area of activity. These complaints can be vexatious and the service manager will use judgement to decide if the complaint should be investigated as a new complaint. In some cases, we may decide not to use the complaints procedure if the complaint is trivial or if the complainant has not suffered any injustice. The Service Manager and the Complaints Manager would need to agree this course of action before it was taken.
- 15.3 New complaints about different matters will be considered as normal under our complaints' procedure taking account of any restrictions we may have applied on communication.

Section D – Taking Action

16.0 Imposing Restrictions

- 16.1 If a decision to impose restrictions on contact is being considered, the Service Manager will decide if a restriction should be imposed. This decision will be made in consultation with the Director(s) responsible for the area of work and the Complaints Manager.

17.0 Gathering Evidence

- 17.1 Evidence of the unreasonable behaviour is required and it is important to note that the policy will not be invoked if there is insufficient evidence to support our actions.
- 17.2 Evidence such as a contact log, file notes, emails, social media postings screen shots etc can be used to demonstrate the unreasonable behaviour e.g. retaining a copy of an abusive email.

18.0 Options to manage unreasonable behaviour

- 18.1 If Customers continue to behave unreasonably after we have asked them to modify their behaviour, we will consider the following options
- i. Requiring you to contact a named employee or other single point of contact only e.g. the complaints team
 - ii. Restricting contact in writing or to a designated email address only
 - iii. Restricting contact by telephone, face to face or digital to specified days and times
 - iv. Not responding to you if you persistently raise issues which we have considered in full under your right to request a review of that decision. We will decline to respond to further correspondence which does not raise new issues. The correspondence will be read and filed but we will not acknowledge it unless you provide significant new information or evidence relating to the matter.
 - v. Not responding to your correspondence or blocking emails that are abusive or offensive
 - vi. Restricting the issues we will communicate with you about
 - vii. Returning or deleting large volumes of irrelevant communication you have sent to us
 - viii. Blocking your email contact with us if the number or length of or volume of contacts cc'd into the email causes us difficulty in conducting our business
 - ix. Re-directing your emails to a generic email account to be managed for example where you have cc'd many contacts, multiple times
 - x. Requesting that you are supported by an independent third party such as Citizens Advice or a legal representative. This option may be suggested where you have made several unfounded allegations in the past
- 18.2 The list is not exhaustive. Any one option or a combination of them may be applied to Customers.

18.3 A blanket ban on contact will not be applied for an unspecified period of time. We do not support a blanket policy of ignoring genuine service requests or complaints where they are founded and any decision we make we will take this into account.

19.0 Corporate Single Point of Contact

19.10 Where a complainant or Customer continues to behave unreasonably, we may decide to limit contact to a corporate Single Point of Contact (SPOC), normally managed in the Complaints Team. This decision will be made by the relevant Director, the Director of Legal Services and the Deputy Chief Executive.

19.10 This action will usually be considered after the service has attempted to manage contact within the service unsuccessfully or where the Customer is submitting complaints over many service areas or where the particular circumstances of the Customer or complainant require this approach to be taken immediately

19.13 The Complaints Manager will provide support as necessary to Service Managers and Directors in taking the decision to apply a corporate SPOC.

20.0 Exceptional Circumstances

20.1 In exceptional circumstances, we reserve the right to take appropriate action that is specific to the unreasonable behaviour that is under consideration. For example

- When the unreasonable behaviour is being targeted towards one Employee or Member, we may impose a ban on contact to prevent the Customer from contacting that person and to protect their welfare.
- When the unreasonable behaviour includes face to face threatening behaviour to Employees or Members in our buildings, we may impose a ban to prevent the Customer from entering our offices and report the matter to the Police
- When the unreasonable behaviour includes publication of derogatory remarks against Employees or Members either in printed media or online or via social media, we may act to prevent such behaviour where it is appropriate to do so, including reporting the matter to the Police or taking legal action against you.

20.2 We will look at exceptional cases on their own merit and will take all necessary action that we consider is appropriate for the circumstances. The ban on contact will normally be time limited. We will ensure that the action we take is supported by appropriate evidence and that the reasons for taking the decision are recorded.

21.0 Notifying the Customer or complainant

21.2 We will contact the complainant in writing by letter or email setting out

- Why the behaviour is causing concern

- A request for the behaviour to change
- The actions we could take if the behaviour does not change

21.3 In exceptional circumstances, the unreasonable behaviour is such that a decision to restrict contact will be made without first issuing a warning to the complainant or Customer. In these cases, we will explain our decision to impose a restriction without warning to you when we write to you to confirm the restrictions that have been put in place.

21.4 If the unreasonable behaviour continues, restriction(s) will be put in place.

21.5 In some cases, it will be appropriate to issue the letter or email unsigned from a generic organisational email address for example Customer.feedback@oldham.gov.uk . This will be rare but will be considered where there is a history of the complainant or Customer targeting (or they have links with other Members of the public who have a history of targeting) specific Employees and Members in writing, online or on social media.

21.6 In other cases, depending on the severity of the issue and where the unreasonable behaviour covers more than one service area, the notification may be issued by more senior Employees or our legal team.

21.7 The letter or email will explain

- Why we have taken this decision
- What action we are taking
- How long the action will be in place for
- Your right of appeal
- Your right to contact the LGSCO or other relevant body about the restrictions placed on you under this policy

21.8 A copy of this policy will be enclosed with the letter

22.0 Review of the Decision

22.1 A decision to restrict contact is time limited, usually for 3, 6 or 12 months and will be reviewed by the Employee who made the original decision. The review will take place shortly before the end date of the period of restriction.

22.2 The Customer or complainant will be informed in writing (by letter or email) of the result of this review if the decision to apply this policy has been changed, ended or extended.

23.0 Right of Appeal

23.1 When we write to a Customer or complainant about a decision to restrict or extend restrictions on contact, we will set out the right to request an appeal. The appeal must be submitted within one month of the date of the letter.

23.2 An appeal will not be considered by the Employee making the original decision. A different Employee will be appointed to consider the appeal

e.g. this could be the line manager of the Employee who made the original decision or a Service Manager or Director from a different service area as appropriate.

23.3 There will be no further right of appeal.

24.0 Record Keeping and sharing of information

24.1 Records will be kept by the Service Manager, and where appropriate the Complaints Manager, of the details of the case and the action that has been taken. The record will include

- The name and address of the Customer
- What the restrictions are and when these end/are due to be reviewed
- The evidence to support the decision making
- When the Customer/complainant were notified of the restrictions
- If this information has been shared with other services as appropriate including any outside of our organisation

24.2 Examples of the standard format/templates to use when keeping records and decision makers' responsibilities in maintaining records and conducting reviews will be available for Employees and Members on the Council's intranet.

24.3 When making a decision to share information within the Council and with third parties, the Council will always be guided by the provisions of the Data Protection Act (DPA) and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and will ensure that the Customer's rights to have their information processed in accordance with the statutory requirements is protected and adhered to.

24.4 We may seek legal advice about how best to manage unreasonable behaviour and safeguard the health and safety of Employees and Members. Such advice will be subject to legal and professional privilege and will not be shared with Customers.

25.0 Review of Policies

25.1 The Corporate Complaints Policy and Unreasonable Behaviour Policy will be published on www.oldham.gov.uk These policies will be reviewed annually (or as a change is required). The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Green has delegated authority to agree these changes in consultation with the Director of Finance.

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Update on employment support and local recruitment.

1. Introduction

“ We at the NCA know we cannot deliver on our potential without the expertise, experience and support of our partners in place. But our potential to make a difference to people’s lives beyond our normal caring services is significant. At this time of national crisis the NHS must stand up and do more than its brilliant work in caring for the sick”

Raj Jain, Chief Executive Northern Care Alliance NHS Group 30th October 2020.

The NCA is the largest employer in Oldham. There is a strong link between decent work and good health. We need to use our social, economic and human capital to tackle the inequalities within Oldham. We have a place based organizational form and place brings us to a human scale of operation where we can see the difference that can be made to neighbourhoods and communities. Therefore our Social Value ambition is locally driven supported by Group and was launched through a community of practice launch event on the 30th October 2020 which can be viewed on line: <https://vimeo.com/475455960/b0a6ac64c7>

The approach within the NCA was informed by system conversations notably Oldham Leadership Board (chaired by Cllr Sean Fielding) following work with CLES in 2017 on Anchor Institutions and a meeting in late 2019 with Oldham College and Oldham Cares regarding workforce development potential and how the work of the NCA could be “anchored” to the wider system. This has led to the development of 5 pillars of social value; environment, place, people, purchasing and to anchor or influence.



This update will focus on the people pillar and provide an update to Oldham Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the range of initiatives which are being put in place to provide local employment opportunities with particular focus on young people who during times of economic downturn have historically been disadvantaged in obtaining meaningful paid work. In recent times, the world, particularly of work has changed significantly and like the disease the economic impact of COVID will fall disproportionately on low income communities. Oldham has been identified as in the top 10 localities in the country in danger of seeing the highest economic impact and associated increase in health inequalities.

NCA has agreed by 2025 the following ambitions:

- Create 1000 pre-employment opportunities across the NCA for those furthest away from the employment from a baseline of 320. Approximately 210 will be created in Oldham, from a baseline of 17 (2019-20).
- 85% of pre-employment learners will be supported into paid work from NCA baseline of 55% and 31% in Oldham.
- 50% of those employed by the NCA to be local resident of Oldham from 45% (based on NCA configuration of Oct 2019) which is approximately 80 jobs each year in Oldham.
- Support 1000 staff to become NHS Career Ambassadors by 2025 of which 220 will be in Oldham.

The NCA has secured over £100k to support people into work and to provide young people with experience of the NHS. This is from the Oldham opportunity area and Greater Manchester Combined Authority. The COVID pandemic whilst accelerating the importance and significance of this work has presented some challenges and plans have had to be modified for example, the NHS has had to limit visitors to its site and face to face interactions including work experience was initially suspended and is slowly coming back in a limited way in line with national guidance.

There is a risk that this or future surge in COVID-19 hospital cases could result in the government re-introducing restrictions as to who is allowed to access our sites. We hope that the digital solutions will mitigate some of this and if necessary we will work funders to manage this dynamic situation which remains out of our control.

2. Work with Oldham Schools

In an ideal world we would inspire children and young people about NHS careers and job opportunities much earlier. The evidence is compelling: a young person who has four or more encounters with an employer is 86% less likely to be unemployed or not in education or training and can earn up to 22% more during their career. Importantly the earlier these encounters take place the better because research shows that:

- Children at age 6 see jobs and future pathways as gendered
- Almost half of children age 7 base their career aspirations on people they know.
- Children at age 9 they are becoming more aware of potential constraints on their futures based on perceptions of social class, perceived intelligence and social mobility¹.

The NHS Career Ambassadors Programme is a national programme which relies on NHS staff volunteering and then acts as a broker with schools. There are currently 70 NHS Career Ambassadors within Oldham with the plan to increase this to 220 by 2025 as part of the commitment to support 1000 NHS Career Ambassadors across the NCA.

Obviously going into schools has been limited due to the pandemic. Therefore, we are currently focusing on non-patient facing roles e.g. HR, finance, digital and supporting schools remotely. Any Oldham school who is interested are encouraged to register with NHS Career Ambassador Programme and utilise this national resource which is in place rather than set up a unique infrastructure for Oldham. The intention is to pick this up with schools in the run up to the new academic year in 2021 and facilitate face to face contact between NHS staff and children.

3. Work with Oldham College.

The government is bringing in changes to technical education. The NCA funded by the Opportunity Area has been able to support Oldham College by seconding Julie Miller, a healthcare scientist and educationalist to review the health and social care T level curriculum to ensure it reflected opportunities for healthcare science given the large laboratory on the Royal Oldham site. This was so successful that the college have agreed to continue with this secondment into 2021 and focus on further curriculum design support for nursing cadet programme and estates and facilities roles. These new T levels include up to 90 days work experience which the NCA has committed to support these within health and social care.

4. Support to Young People to gain skills and experience by volunteering

For many, volunteering is a great way of gaining experience and an understanding of the world of work. During the COVID crisis we have seen an increase in the number of volunteers support the NHS and wider communities. Funded through the Oldham Opportunity Area by August 2021 we will co-produce 30 new volunteering opportunities in Oldham for young people supported by Barnado's.

5. Support to young people to gain work experience

The original plan with Oldham Opportunity Board was to hold two Open Days for 100 young people in the spring and summer of last year, which was not possible then and in the foreseeable future. Therefore, we are creating a digital knowledge hub which will be accessible to all young people interested in a career with the NHS it will sit underneath the NCA recruitment and be linked to the Oldham College website. This will be completed by August 2021.

On site work experience was suspended during COVID and is likely to recommence towards in autumn 2021. Historically, the NCA supported over 400 individual work experiences opportunities with over 70 happening in Oldham.

6. Support into Employment for Young People with Learning Disability

The NCA already supports a "bridging the gap" which is a supported internship programme for young people from New Bridge School taking place over an academic year. This has been in existence for a number of years, although suspended during COVID this will be reinstated as soon as possible.

7. Providing Pre-employment opportunities

This has been challenging during COVID and we committed to enabling 20 young people to undertake a pre-employment opportunity funded through the Opportunity Area consisting of three elements; a 10 week work placements; support to obtaining the Care Certificate and support with English and Maths. Given the practical nature of this course it is not possible to deliver this all virtually and therefore this was suspended until February 2021 and will be in two cohorts of 10 learners with a mixture of on-line learning and physical placements. If successful these learners will be supported into paid employment as healthcare assistants either at the Royal Oldham Hospital or within Oldham Community Health Services and there are sufficient vacancies to enable this.

The NCA in partnership with the Prince's Trust supports the "Get into Hospitals" employability programme which supports young disadvantaged people 16-30 years old (NEETs, care leavers, careers, those with mental health or physical health conditions and those with learning disability). A dedicated cohort is due to start in Oldham in March 2021. Given the COVID restrictions this has moved to an on line programme with work experience being provided in existing vacancies as on a "working interview" model.

The NCA Clinical Advisory Group (CAG) has confirmed that pre-employment placements can commence in January 2021 with individual risk assessments taking place for each learner to the same standard as if they were employed staff. This may restrict some learners due to the risks identified being limited to certain placements or areas of the hospital. It is hoped that this will be managed on an individual basis.

8. Kickstart

This is a government initiative whereby employers provide a 6 month learning opportunity for young people in receipt of universal credit and at risk of long term unemployment. The government backfills employers with 25 hours of minimum wage. The NCA has been approved as a Kickstart employer and our first cohort of 30 learners will start across the NCA in April 2021. There will be 5 learners on the Oldham site. The NCA are in negotiations with the DWP to support additional cohorts.

9. Apprenticeships.

The NCA offers a range of apprenticeships (nurse associates, catering, estates, business administration and healthcare science for example) and there are currently 105 within Oldham. These range from level 2 to level 7 indicating that apprenticeship is not just about accessing jobs but ensuring career progression.

Level	Number
2	26
3	14
4	6
5	32
6	15
7	12

However, it is recognised that there are barriers for some people to obtain apprenticeship positions and therefore we also offer pre-apprenticeship opportunities.

10. GMCA Removing Barriers to Apprenticeships – Young People

This project is held jointly with Positive Steps and Oldham Council. This will create 40 pre-employment opportunities for Young People who will be supported initially by Positive Steps until a work place experience can be created on the Royal Oldham Site or Oldham Community Health services. From these 40 learners, 10 will be supported to apprenticeships with us. Furthermore, Positive Steps will be based for 2 years at Royal Oldham Hospital to support any existing member of staff, volunteer, learners or patient aged 16-25 who require support to obtain work, stay in work or access further adult education. The 10 apprenticeships will need to be found from existing vacancies. The intention is to offer other partners within Oldham Cares the opportunity to host pre-employment opportunities and or apprenticeships.

11.Support within communities

Oldham has a rich diverse population and the NCA is committed to inclusivity to ensure that our workforce reflects the communities we serve.

The NCA through Director of Social Value Creation and the Associate Director of Equality and Inclusion have made significant progress in reaching out to Coldhurst community. This has included listening and insight work as to the perception of the NCA as an employer. As a consequence of this relationship we have managed to secure a grant from the GMCA with Get Oldham Working and Oldham Council. This will create 20 pre-employment opportunities for the BAME community in Coldhurst who will be supported initially by Get Oldham Working until a work place experience can be created on the Royal Oldham Site or Oldham Community Health services. From these 20 learners, 10 will be supported to apprenticeships with us. In addition the job coaches from Get Oldham Working will work with the BAME community in Coldhurst and make recommendations to our recruitment and pre-employment offer and hopefully increase the BAME participation in existing programmes e.g. Bridging the Gap and Princes Trust. The 10 apprenticeships will need to be found from existing vacancies and converted to apprenticeships. The intention is to offer other partners within Oldham Cares the opportunity to host pre-employment opportunities and or apprenticeships.

11. Next Steps

From the 1st April the NCA will produce a framework which will track progress in each of our localities against our social value ambitions to:

- Create 1000 pre-employment opportunities across the NCA for those furthest away from the employment from a baseline of 320. Approximately 210 will be created in Oldham, from a baseline of 17 (2019-20).
- 85% of pre-employment learners will be supported into paid work from NCA baseline of 55% and 31% in Oldham.
- 50% of those employed by the NCA to be local resident of Oldham from 45% (based on NCA configuration of Oct 2019) which is approximately 80 jobs each year in Oldham.
- Support 1000 staff to become NHS Career Ambassadors by 2025

External financial support will continue to be required to support this agenda and a partnership approach seems to be most successful. We will continue to develop this and welcome any suggestions from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Donna McLaughlin

Director of Social Value Creation

14th January 2021

¹ The ACEVO commission on Youth Unemployment; *Youth Unemployment: the crisis we cannot afford*; London 2012.

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Briefing to Overview and Scrutiny Board

Date: January 2021

Subject: Homelessness Strategy Update

For Discussion

Report of: Bryn Cooke – Head of Housing

Summary of the issue:

Whilst the completion of the revised Homelessness Strategy itself has been delayed until the Summer, a request has been made for a brief progress update to the Board, which is therefore as outlined below.

Recommendations to Overview and Scrutiny Board:

To note the information/update provided and to consider the Strategy more fully at a future meeting as appropriate.

1.0 Background

Oldham Council is in the process of developing a new Homelessness Strategy for the borough, which was due to be published by April 2021.

2.0 Current Position

This anticipated publication date has now been moved back to September 2021, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing need to focus the majority of resources on the frontline response to homelessness. This includes (however is by no means limited to) – implementation of the government’s rough sleeping directives such as ‘Everyone In’, moving services online and ensuring that temporary accommodation facilitates complied with social distancing measures.

With regards to the development of the new strategy itself, consultation has however been undertaken with residents, stakeholders and elected members, and a full desktop review of homelessness within the borough has been drafted. Early indications have highlighted a particular need to focus on tackling evictions and other issues in the private rented sector; domestic abuse and relationship breakdown; and meeting support needs to promote tenancy sustainment, such as mental health issues and debt management.

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Report to Overview and Scrutiny Board

Portfolio Holders: Councillor Arooj Shah, Cabinet Member for Covid 19

Councillor Cath Ball, Deputy Cabinet Member (Poverty)

Officer Contact: Amanda Richardson, Policy Manager

Report Authors Overview and Scrutiny Poverty Task and Finish Group (Cllrs Yasmin Toor, Liz Jacques, Ruji Surjan, Elaine Taylor, Louie Hamblett, Cath Ball, Colin McLaren)

Purpose of the Report: to provide a review of the strategies endeavouring to address poverty in Oldham and to consider a way forward.

Recommendations:

That the Board notes the proposals and invites the Cabinet and Council to endorse the strategy.

Consider reviewing or rewriting the Poverty Strategy last updated in 2010.

Review the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme.

Investigate further means of developing the Green New Deal Programme

Determine a means of developing a programme to promote volunteering, access to training, gaining qualifications and entry to employment (in conjunction with further education providers).

To commission a further report to demonstrate how poverty can be tackled through the Place Based Initiative/District working.

Investigate whether there is a need to establish a charitable foundation to support the anti poverty programme.

Background

In March 2020, the O/S Board agreed to establish a T/F group and finalised the terms of reference at the first meeting of this municipal year which was held in June 2020 (see appendix A).

Once established, the group has endeavoured to ascertain the nature and extent of strategies and services designed to address poverty (as well as inequality and disadvantage). It was recognised that it would be impossible to address every aspect of poverty and that the group would need to focus on those areas where it might be possible to make a difference. Members of the T/F Group have met most, if not all, Cabinet Members to discuss different aspects of the poverty agenda. Some of the ideas and information provided have been incorporated into this report. It was also assumed that there was unlikely to be any assistance from Central Government in the present climate. Any support that was possible would have to be derived from within Oldham and supported by access to the grant system (where possible) in conjunction with the voluntary sector.

Much has been published in newspapers and other outlets about Covid 19 and the nature and extent to which it has exposed inequality, disadvantage and deprivation. One example was provided by Michael Marmot, Professor of Epidemiology at UCL. He states that "England's comparatively poor management of the pandemic was of a piece with its health management falling behind that of other rich countries in the previous decade.

There are four possible explanations, the quality of governance and political culture, which did not prioritise the conditions for good health; increases in economic and social inequalities, including a rise in poverty of families with children; a policy of austerity with cuts to funding of public services that were regressive; and a poor state of the nation's health. Addressing all four of these is at the heart of what needs to be done to bring about change.

He continues that "to emerge from this pandemic in a healthier state, we need commitment at two levels. First, to social justice and putting equity of health and wellbeing at the heart of all policy making. The second is to take specific actions to create healthier lives for all throughout life; from reducing levels of child poverty, to ensuring that wages (or benefits) are sufficient to lead a healthy life, to creating the conditions for older people to lead meaningful lives.....Inequality in health is a solvable problem. It is in all our interests to build back fairer.

Anticipating Central Government to begin to address this situation is unlikely. However, another phenomenon has emerged during the pandemic. This was highlighted by John Harris who wrote about "droves of volunteers who were gripped by community spirit coming together to help deliver food and medicines to their vulnerable neighbours, check on the welfare of people experiencing poverty and loneliness, and much more besides. The message was that the state was either absent or unreliable, so people were having to do things for themselves. This prompted the Labour run London Borough of Barking and Dagenham to develop a new way of collaborating with voluntary and grassroot groups.From the other side of politics, a report by the Tory MP Danny Kruger, commissioned by the government to look at sustaining the community spirit we saw during lockdown, into the recovery phase and beyond". Kruger proposes a new Community Power Act, using deliberative democracy, participatory budgeting and citizen assemblies "to create the plural public square we need". This is an issue that needs to be serious consideration.

It is worth reflecting on some of the steps taken to address the crisis in Oldham during the past year including the following:

Types of Poverty and what we are doing.

1. Food

On average- we distribute 700 lots of food per week to families throughout Oldham.

Food Bank,

- a. Our main food bank is now in a unit on Derker and is run in conjunction with the Trussell trust. We are delivering food for the foreseeable future, there is no pickup.

- *There is a lack of volunteers and we need some more comms about this.*
 - *We also do not deliver appropriate food for Asian Families.*
 - *We have some Growing Oldham Feeding Ambition money to look at a paid worker. Following a meeting between the children's society, ourselves, and the food bank, we discussed a long-term plan to have a large community hub in the centre of town. It would then make sense to have a full-time worker.*
 - *The Food Bank has also received some money from the Defra funding, as well as lots of individual donations.*
- b. *Bread and Butter, FCHO do this from Sholver Community Centre, NEON and Walshaw Street, and they work with Fair share. On average they say they get 80-100 families at each session. To use this, you pay a small amount of money per year and then an amount of money, possibly £3.50, for £15 of shopping.*
- c. *Family Action- Family action have recently come to Oldham, and 3 places were suggested by Action Together: Hollinwood, Fitton Hill and Coldhurst. It works like Bread and Butter and they work in conjunction with Fare Share. Fitton Hill has about 80 families per session.*
- d. *Geoff Goodwin- Bethesda Chapel Royton- Geoff provides food for residents. He works a scheme whereby he gives 69p Frozen meals from Tesco's. Geoff offers to put Freezers and shelves into school's community centres, which his church pays value of £500., and then allocates £1500 to keep the freezer and shelves stocked up.*
- e. *European Islamic Centre- They do meals and food parcels of approximately 80-100 per week*
- f. *Ukeff- provides support to a wide range of people on a regular basis*

Food Growing

- a. *Get Oldham Growing - run by the LA, works with residents to set up growing hubs and small-scale growing places.*
- b. *Growing Oldham Feeding Ambition. GOFA is currently not meeting. Originally Received a sum of money from Lord Mawson, which they used over a period of 3 years to fund Projects. It was very ably run by Dominic (now in Australia), supported by Nikki from IF Oldham (no longer in business), and Euey Madden (now retired). The aims and objectives are-Make it Pay, Grow More, Share More, Learn More, Waste Less.*
- c. *Oldham Food Network- The community-led Oldham Food Network and the Growing Oldham Feeding Ambition partnership work together to:*
- *Co-ordinate food activity and support local communities*
 - *Increase food education and skills*
 - *Grow food enterprise*
 - *Communicate opportunities and share resources*
- d. *Well North - a collaboration between public health and government bodies that helps local people to have healthy and vibrant lives, and get involved in making their community an exciting and inspiring place*
- e. *Sustainable Food Cities- we won the Bronze award, are looking now at the Silver award*
- f. *Park Food hubs Our Parks have set up Growing hubs: Alexandra, Waterhead, Failsworth, Lees, Dunwood. During the Summer they have been delivering fresh vegetables to the Food Bank for distribution.*
- g. *Food Sync- has been commissioned by the Council to put together a Food and Growing Strategy. A draft strategy has now been produced which needs to be implemented.*

- h. FOSP- Friends of Stoneleigh Park- growing hub with the Park Compound, grown for the children to help grow and cook during holidays and at the Friday Youth Club. Parts of Stoneleigh Park are an edible park, food grown for people to use.
- i. Allotments
- j. Northern Routes

Cooking and Diet

- a. WIFI northwest- has been commissioned to work with specific groups on improving their diet. Has worked with FOSP on their Grow and Cook project.
- b. Community Groups-have, in the past, run cooking sessions, like how to cook using a slow cooker, and how to prepare food using food that the children have helped grow. These are run in conjunction with holiday hunger projects

Holiday Hunger

Money via the Government's Covid Winter Grant funding has enabled children in receipt of Free School meals to access food, via a voucher scheme, over Christmas and February Half Term.

A further funding is expected from the DFE's Holiday Activities and Food programme to ensure provision is also made for the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays 2021.

Other money has been sent to Action Together to support community groups that are getting together ideas to support families who are struggling.

Actions- Food Security Group set up. (membership includes Public Health, Policy, emerging Communities, Green space development, Council Comms, Action Together, Keyring, Ancora Project and Cllrs Shah and Ball).

Holiday Hunger Provision was organised for this Christmas, and this group will then look at what needs to be done for half term.

This group reports to the Oldham Food Partnership Board and contributes to the Annual report of the Community Wealth Building Board.

This Policy will be circulated as soon as it is agreed.

2. Fuel

- a. Warm Homes - run by the Local authority- is an excellent service, and they have recently received £50k funding from Defra the Covid Winter Grant allocation. This is to help with fuel vouchers and boiler repairs.
- b. Energy companies now work with their customers to help in cases of emergency.
- c. Food Bank can give out Fuel vouchers?

Actions: Check on the capacity of warm homes. Information to helpline and District teams. How to get access to fuel vouchers?

3. Finance and Advice

- a. *Help line. This line was set up at the beginning of lockdown, as a Covid Emergency line. Calls are answered by our Customer centre, triaged and some passed onto our District teams. Calls have increased over the last few weeks. Main referrals were for food, medicines and other essentials. The customer centre also did calls for test and trace*
- b. *CAB, Citizens advice Bureau, funded centrally by LA, extra funding by local Cllrs. Aim – to have CAB appts done face to face online via Community hubs*
- c. *Welfare rights, based in the Council buildings*
- d. *Debt Counselling- There are 6 members of LA staff FCHO run a money management support for their tenants. Christians against Poverty have one lady who does this.*
- e. *Credit Union- promote Sound as a Pound campaign*
- f. *Local Welfare Assistance Scheme.*
- g. *Ancora Project which will need some additional funding to be able to continue.*

Action; Reassess helpline, look at how we triage and what issues are dealt with by the Districts, and who do we refer to. Mapping is needed of active community groups (a mapping exercise is underway by Action Together).

Discussion has been held with the Children's Society about a single referral form or the use of an App (Greater Manchester Poverty Action). It has been agreed that we would set up an Access to Advice Forum, possibly as a subgroup of the Poverty Agenda group.

4. Health

- a.
- b. *Mental Health*
 - *Tameside, Oldham, Glossop Mind, includes support for veterans*
 - *Early help,*
 - *Age UK*
 - *Schools- mental health for children as part of the Emotional Health and Mental Wellbeing programme/Whole School Approach*
 - *Off the record- for teenagers, paid for centrally, extra sessions paid for by St James and Chadderton Cllrs.*

Some local groups provide drop and lunches for people who are socially isolated.

- c. *Physical health*

Poor diet means additional future problems later in life as people will be susceptible to more chronic illness and earlier death.

- a. *GP's lots of preventative work done by GPs, but this has been reduced since March*
- b. *Leisure outlets- these run many healthy activities, but they are way out of the price range of people on low incomes, and many have been closed since March.*

Actions: Work with community groups to see what sessions there are for people who are socially isolated.

5. Environment, Green spaces

- a. *Fulwood Rangers*
- g. *Snipe Clough/Northern Roots*

- b. Millennium Green
- c. Parks
- d. Strinesdale
- e. Daisy Nook
- f. Beal Valley
- h. Tandle Hills
- j. Crompton Moor
- i. Bishops Park
- k. Dovestones

There is a lack of Green spaces, in many areas. Cost of transport to other Green areas is prohibitive to many residents. Use of local Green spaces is very important in reducing stress and mental health.

6. Digital

Internet- the Covid crisis has highlighted that many households do not have access to the Internet, some only have access via limited data on their phones. This has had a severe detriment on many families. Most of our Comms and information is online.

- a. *DWP- can help with laptops for those who are job seeking. They also provide dongles if needed.*
- b. *Children in our schools-lap tops and dongles have been distributed to specific school groups but many more are needed.*

Actions; Collect data of Digital exclusion. Make sure all our Comms, advice sessions etc are made available in a non-digital format.

7. Employment

- a. *Get Oldham Working*
- b. *DWP- working together with DWP, at the Poverty Agenda Group and at Poverty Steering Group*
- c. *Community Education-We are looking at the possibility of holding employment courses that we can put on in the community, and others that may help parents have more aspirations educationally for their children.*
- d. *Child Care- need to assess availability of affordable childcare.*
- e. *DWP will provide laptops and Dongles for those who are job searching. They have to contact their work coaches.*
- f.

8. Community support, different groups

We are blessed in Oldham with many local groups, charities.

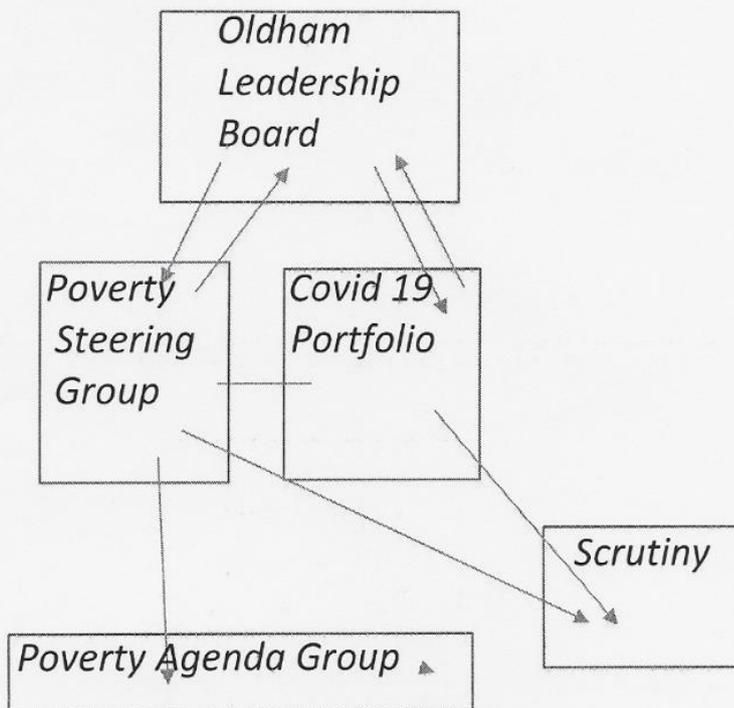
We are mapping what groups are still working or are having Covid problems.

Some communities have a community building that can be utilised for support groups like Sholver, Greenacres, Neon, Failsworth and others. Citizens Advice Bureau are using IT equipment in some community centres, to allow "face to face" appointments.

Action Together- This is the organisation that supports our volunteers and groups.

Making sure they have the correct policies, and training to run their group properly. They also help groups apply for funding and are also responsible for supporting groups who

11. Draft Poverty Governance Structures



Some thought might need to be given to the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme and whether it can be further developed, strengthened and improved. Greater Manchester Poverty Action published a report in December 2020 entitled "Strengthening the Role of Local Welfare Assistance". It would seem that there is considerable variation in such schemes across Greater Manchester. The O/S T/F Group felt it was worth reviewing local provision and have posed a series of questions.

See Appendix (but are below for now)

Also, some consideration should be given to the development of the Green New Deal. As the future has to be green, a review of the current strategy would be beneficial in order to try and identify potential sources of funding to promote a strategy to create new jobs, new forms of employment, a self-help approach to reducing poverty and employment. This might include the creation of incubators, help to become self-employed, engaging with the private sector to introduce projects that include extensive social value. How can we engage with children to get them to lead an Environmental Campaign?

This might also include harnessing voluntary activity, generating a credit to access training (at Oldham College), gaining qualifications and, eventually, employment. It is evident that the Green New Deal has considerable potential and is on the cusp of rapid expansion but needs to identify acceptable partners to achieve much progress. We are also looking at working in the community, working with parents on having ambition for their children and supporting them in their future educational needs, (Shaid leading on this.)

are looking at taking on an asset transfer. They are also running the Winter Support Advice on their Website.

Action: following discussion with various community groups and partners who feel there is a need for a community hub in the town centre, to run alongside Access Oldham where people can be sign signposted for relevant support.

- a. Work with community groups to see what sessions there are for people who are socially isolated.
- b. Also look at any funding opportunities, possibly Thriving Communities Funding Opportunities Group, or the development of a Strategic Investment Fund and consider priorities. How to make the Covid Recovery Fund sustainable
- c. Need to map what groups are out there and available to support our residents.

9. Greater Manchester Poverty Action

They have put together a framework for poverty and host many conferences and meetings. Their poverty monitor can be found on

<https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/poverty-monitor-2020/>

They are also running a socio- economic duty campaign

<https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/socio-economic-duty/> asking public bodies in Greater Manchester to apply this.

GMPA are also working with the Food Security Strategy group on a pilot to look at how people visiting food banks can best access financial advice and support; including an assessment of existing referral mechanisms

10. Ward Data

Our Intelligence department is about to update our ward data. Some data that we use to look at poverty are only updated every 12 months, so some of the data that we have are over 12 months old.

Overview and Scrutiny: Poverty Task and Finish Group

Members: Councillors Liz Jacques, Elaine Taylor, Vita Price, Yasmin Toor, Ruji Surjan, Cath Ball,
Colin McLaren

Aim: to consider updating the Council's Poverty Strategy (from 2010) taking into account the following (where possible):

Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK Poverty Report 2019/20 – (four main themes)

Information from the Local Government Association and other local, regional and national organisations

Current work being undertaken by Oldham Council

Work with partners in the various hubs and clusters

A) Joseph Rowntree Foundation (main themes)

- 1) Ensuring as many people as possible are in good jobs/suitable employment.
- 2) Improve earnings for low income families; supporting people in low paid employment or working part time; addressing issues associated with in work poverty.
- 3) Supporting people to make more extensive use of the benefits system; improved access with appropriate support; defined as an essential public service.
- 4) Improving the amount of low cost housing available to families on low income; increase support for those with high housing costs; address issues associated with insecurity experienced by many living in private sector living accommodation.

B) Local Government Association

Identify information associated with and supporting the themes outlined in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report.

Also, investigate how many of the 100 innovations introduced when "Labour was in Power" to consider whether they can be utilised/adapted/introduced in Oldham.

C) What Happens in Oldham

Education: primary and secondary support for schools; attendance; results, use of pupil premium: further education: access to courses, apprenticeships, financial support: Life Long Learning courses.

Employment: Get Oldham working, careers advice, work experience, benefits.

Social Services: support for families, reducing isolation, promoting community engagement, community cohesion, mental health.

Housing: warm homes, landlord licencing scheme, homelessness, welfare rights (housing benefit).

Environment: developing community gardens (growing vegetables etc), Get Oldham growing, addressing fly tipping.

Voluntary Sector: see social services above, funding, use of facilities (Community Asset Transfer), opportunities for volunteering (linked to education, training, employment).

Public Health: obesity, smoking, exercise, alcohol, drug abuse.

Finance: help with council tax, housing benefit (see housing/welfare rights above).

This outline attempts to develop a strategy to reduce poverty and inequality in the short (12 months), medium (2/3 years) and long (3 years plus) term. It will need to take into account issues associated with gender and ethnicity. It will need to consider how the grant system might be utilised to support some aspects of the programme. This should not be regarded as an exclusive list but as a basis for further discussion. We have to try and build on the work that is already taking place in Oldham.

D) Working with our Partners (including Voluntary Groups)

To develop a better understanding of the nature and extent of the issues associated with poverty and inequality, the task and finish group may take the opportunity to obtain information from local community groups (who are working on different aspects and in different areas), as well as foodbanks, Real Change Charity, Action Together and other appropriate organisations. Some attention will need to be given to supporting and developing the Truth Commission to help gather evidence to promote a strategy in order to address different aspects of poverty and inequality.

E) Impact of Covid 19

Needless to say, Covid 19 will have had a significant impact on any programme of work. It is evident that levels of poverty and inequality will have increased during the past six months. These changes may need to be quantified in order to determine whether some (or all) of the themes and priorities outlined above may need to be reviewed in the light of changing circumstances.

Appendix

1. *To what extent is it possible to protect the LWAS budget and to available national funding to expand provision in the face of increased demand and to introduce a multi-year commitment?*
2. *Is it possible to implement any other efficiencies in order to allow any released revenue to be utilised to reach potentially unsupported and vulnerable residents? Is it possible to check that each Council policy is evaluated for its effect on Poverty?*
3. *Has there been a recent review of the LWAS and its position within the local authority to ensure that it is in an appropriate place and is connected to relevant teams?*
4. *Is it possible to confirm that Oldham adopts a resident focussed approach which offers wide support to residents to help them address their challenges using case workers rather than a transactional LWAS service?*
5. *Is it possible to explain the nature and extent of any co-ordinating groups intended to bring partners together in order to improve the mechanism for supporting those in financial crisis?*
6. *Has any consideration been given as to how the LWAS can act as a hub for broader crisis support and taking responsibility for tracking an individual journey through the support system to ensure that anyone can access the most appropriate support to meet their needs?*
7. *Has it proved possible to take a "cash first" rather than a "voucher" approach to supporting anyone through the LWAS?*
8. *To what extent has Oldham been able to provide furnishings and white goods using a cash grant or loan whilst allowing a degree of choice?*
9. *Has there been a recent review of any website content relating to LWAS (and other possible benefits) to ensure it uses simple language and is available in other languages?*
10. *To what extent is the LWAS promoted among groups and forums?*
11. *Has training to front line staff been modified in order to improve awareness of the LWAS and to ensure a clear understanding of residents' entitlements in any given circumstances?*
12. *Has the application process been reviewed to produce a single form, and to consider whether the number of questions asked can be reduced, and the wording simplified?*
13. *To what extent is the telephone link advertised and is accessible to anyone seeking help?*
14. *Has it proved possible to review eligibility criteria for the LWAS in order to ensure that the criteria are sufficiently flexible to support those in crisis?*
15. *How often is LWAS compiled and distributed within the Council and to other partners and interested parties?*

Data

There is lots of data out there, but the majority is at least a year old- pre Covid.

1. Nomis

Census data- last data was 2011.

2. Stats.xplore

Benefits, some of this data up to date.

People on UC in GM

Oct 2020- 308k, Nov 2020 316K

Oldham 20,734 not in employment and 11,363 in employment – October 2020

3. Greater Manchester Poverty Action Group- Poverty Monitor

a. School readiness- stats from 2019 data published April 2020.

b. Child poverty, this gives you the statistics of before and after housing costs. It is down to ward level. 2019 stats.

Alex 54.3%

Chadderton Central 32.7%

Chadderton North 41.2%

Chadderton South 40.9%

Coldhurst 60.9%

Crompton 25.5%

Failsworth East 32.1%

Failsworth West 32.4%

Hollinwood 46%

Medlock Vale 54.2%

Royton North 24.9%

Royton South 28.6%

Saddleworth North- 19.1%

Saddleworth South 19.2%

Saddleworth west 27.6%

Shaw 28.3%

St James 41.3%

St Marys 61.8%

Waterhead 45.1%

Werneth 66.2%

c. Fuel Poverty 2018 Oldham 11.7%

There are two further levels of stats, for smaller than ward level, not PD but MSOI, then LSOI's. These stats are available at LSOI level.

d. Food insecurity is found at MSOI level. Some are cross ward.

1. Shaw and Crompton 19.03%

2. Wood end 23.74%

3. Clough and Shaw Side 17.9%

4. Royton North 16.53%

5. Royton East and Cowlshaw 18.8%
6. Diggle Delph and Denshaw 14.27
7. Moorside and Sholver 22.49%
8. Royton South west 20.77
9. Royton South East 22.19%
10. Chadderton North 22.22%
11. Derker 33.42
12. Waterhead 28.79%
13. Delph Dobcross Austerlands 12.31%
14. Oldham Town North 40.26
15. Middleton Junction 15.09%
16. Busk 41.22%
17. Chadderton Central 25.21%
18. Lees and Hey 20.71%
19. Salem 32.35%
20. Greenfield and Uppermill 14.91%
21. Springhead and Grasscroft 15.53%
22. Alexandra Park 41.13%
- 23.
24. Oldham Town south 37.04%
- 25.
26. Alt 30.50%
27. Chadderton South East 32.09%
28. Chadderton South West 21.54%
29. Hathershaw 33.05%
30. Lime side and Garden Suburbs 32.82%
31. F East 24.87%
32. F west 26.27%
33. Holt Lane and Bardsley 19.66%
34. F south 19.41%

e. *Poverty Premium- extra costs of being poor.*

£500 loan - £757.78

White goods - £233.50 costs £451.75

Gas and Electric £935.20 costs £1077.83

Home Contents insurance- £51.46 costs £61.33

Car Insurance £505.22 costs £973.36

Extra costs £1096.67

f. *Health.*

Public Health statistics 2016-2018 published Dec 2019

Average death in Oldham Male 58 Female 76.

g. *Housing*

Statistics are updated monthly- average monthly wage in Oldham, £1,291 with average £475 housing costs.

h. *Housing benefits*

Regular updates with Universal credit amounts and the amount of housing benefit element.

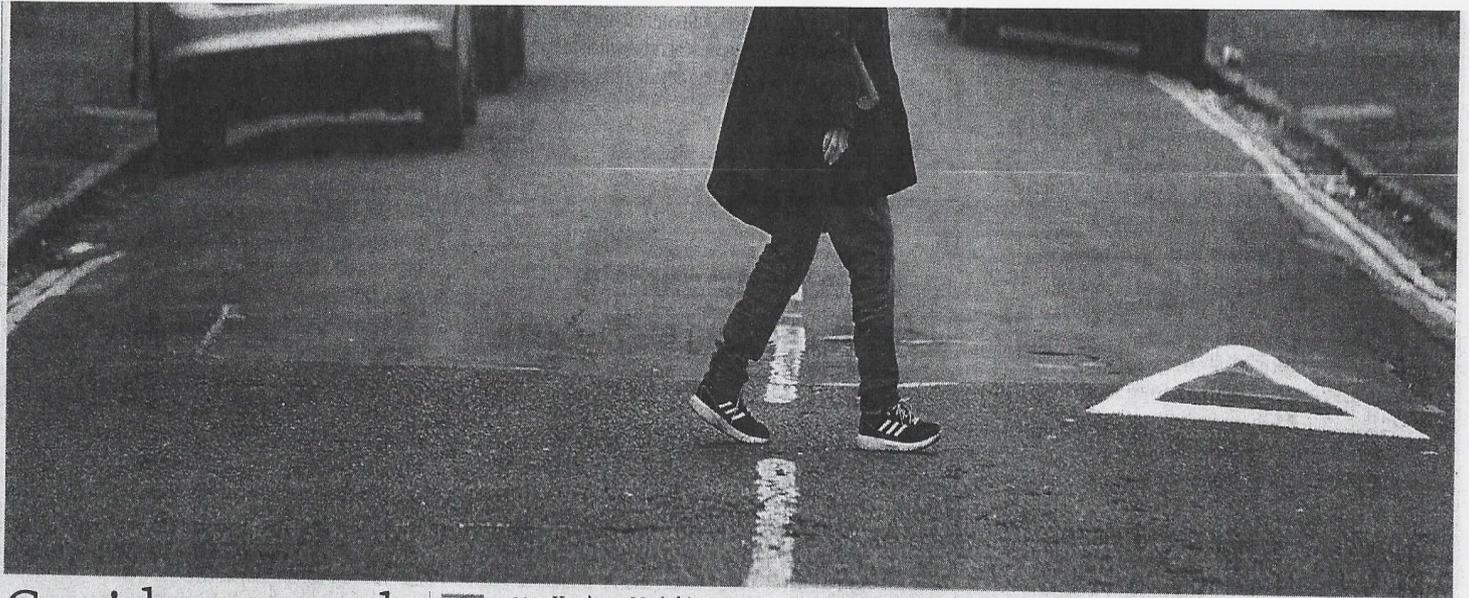
4. *Child Poverty Action*
Lots of statistics and reports.

5. *Joseph Rowntree Trust*
Again, more statistics and reports.

One shows that a single parent with children suffer poverty the worst.

As Councillors we all need to have access to Corvu, and our ward profiles be updated as soon as possible.

We can use all this data to work with our community and partners to make sure our residents have appropriate support.



Covid exposed inequality that must never be 'normal' again

Michael Marmot



In 2017, Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico. The official number of casualties as a result of the storm is 64. But take into account the longer-term consequences - devastated infrastructure, overwhelmed hospitals - and the death toll rises to the thousands. When we look closely at these figures, we see something else too: two months afterwards, mortality had risen sharply for the lowest socioeconomic group, somewhat for the middle group, and least for the highest group. A huge external shock had thrust the underlying inequalities in society into sharp relief.

So it has been with Covid-19. Inequalities in health, and in the social conditions that lead to ill health, have been amplified by the pandemic and the response to it. With vaccines coming onstream, there is talk of Britain getting back to "normal". But the "normal" that existed in February 2020 is not acceptable. The pandemic must be taken as an opportunity to build a fairer society.

A report that my colleagues and I at University College London have published today uses evidence to suggest how we go about this. In February 2020, just a month before the UK entered a national lockdown, we published a review of what had happened to Britain's health and health inequalities in the 10 years since 2010.

The picture was bleak: stalling life expectancy and rising inequalities between socioeconomic groups and regions. Most remarkable was the bucking of a long-term trend of health improving year on year: a woman living in the most deprived area in the north-east of England, or other areas outside London, had less chance of living a long and healthy life in 2019 than she would have had 10 years ago. We made a series of recommendations, addressing the social determinants of health, for how things could and should improve.

Then Covid-19 changed the world dramatically. But in England the changes have been entirely consistent with its state before the pandemic hit. England's comparatively poor management of the pandemic was of a piece with its health improvement falling behind that of other rich countries in the previous decade.

There are four possible explanations: the quality of governance and political culture, which did not prioritise the conditions for good health; increases in economic and social inequalities, including a rise in poverty among families with children; a policy of austerity and cuts to funding of public services that were regressive; and a poor state of the nation's health. Addressing all four of these is at the heart of what needs to be done to bring about change.

The Gipsyville area of Hull, which last month had one of the highest Covid infection rates in the UK

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER THOMOND

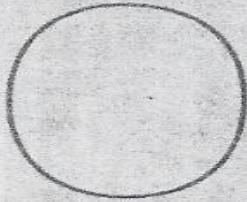
* **Michael Marmot** is professor of epidemiology at University College London and director of the UCL Institute of Health Equity



A striking feature of the pandemic is the way the risk of fatal Covid-19 is distributed unevenly across the UK: the more deprived the area, the higher the mortality rate. This looks rather similar to the picture for all causes of death. Another is the high mortality rate of members of black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. Much of this excess risk can be attributed to living in more deprived areas, working in high-risk occupations, living in overcrowded conditions and, in the case of Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups, a greater prevalence of relevant pre-existing conditions.

Structural racism means that some ethnic groups are more likely to be exposed to adverse social and economic conditions.

Building a fairer society will entail addressing this fundamental cause of social injustice, in addition to the social and economic inequalities that are so pervasive. We also must accept the growing recognition, worldwide, that economic growth is a limited measure of society's success. We would do well to learn from the example of the New Zealand Treasury, which in 2019 put wellbeing at the heart of the government's mission.



Our new report is called Build Back Fairer. One objection to our proposals is about money. Reversing the cuts to children's centres, to per-student funding in schools, to local government, to adult social care, to the health service, will take public spending. So too will paying care

workers a living wage and having more generous safety nets that do not consign families to dire poverty. At a time of huge national debt, can the country afford it?

Britain has tried the austerity experiment. It did not work, if health and wellbeing are the markers of success. Phrases such as "maxing out the nation's credit card" are neither helpful nor based on sound economics. At a time of zero interest rates, with a tax rate that is at the low end among European countries, and with control of its own currency, a nation can borrow and it can tax for the purpose of building a fairer society.

We should not be asking if we can afford for our children's wellbeing to rank better than 27th out of 38 rich countries, or to pay for free school meals during holidays so that eligible children do not go to bed hungry. Social justice requires it.

The problems we lay out are not unique to England. In the US, for example, the widening economic inequalities and the high mortality associated with race and ethnicity are also much in evidence. It was estimated that, from March to September 2020, the wealth of the 643 billionaires in the US increased by 29%, a staggering \$845bn (£630bn). Over the same period the hourly pay of the bottom 80% of the workforce declined by 4%. Inequalities in Britain may be less dramatic, but it's clear that our own level of inequality is not compatible with a fair, healthy society.

To emerge from this pandemic in a healthier state, we need commitment at two levels. First, to social justice and putting equity of health and wellbeing at the heart of all policymaking. Cutting spending in a regressive way - the poorer the area, the steeper the cut - is unfair and is likely to make health inequalities worse.

The pandemic has shown that when the health of the public is severely threatened, other considerations become secondary. Enduring social and economic inequalities mean that the health of the public was threatened before the pandemic and during it, and will be after it. Just as we needed better management of the nation's health during the pandemic, we also need national attention to health inequalities and their causes.

The second level is to take the specific actions to create healthier lives for all throughout life: from reducing levels of child poverty to 10%, to ensuring wages (or benefits for those who cannot work) are sufficient to lead a healthy life, to creating the conditions for older people to lead meaningful lives.

The evidence is clear. There is so much that can be done to improve the quality of people's lives. Inequality in health is a solvable problem. It is in all our interests to build back fairer.

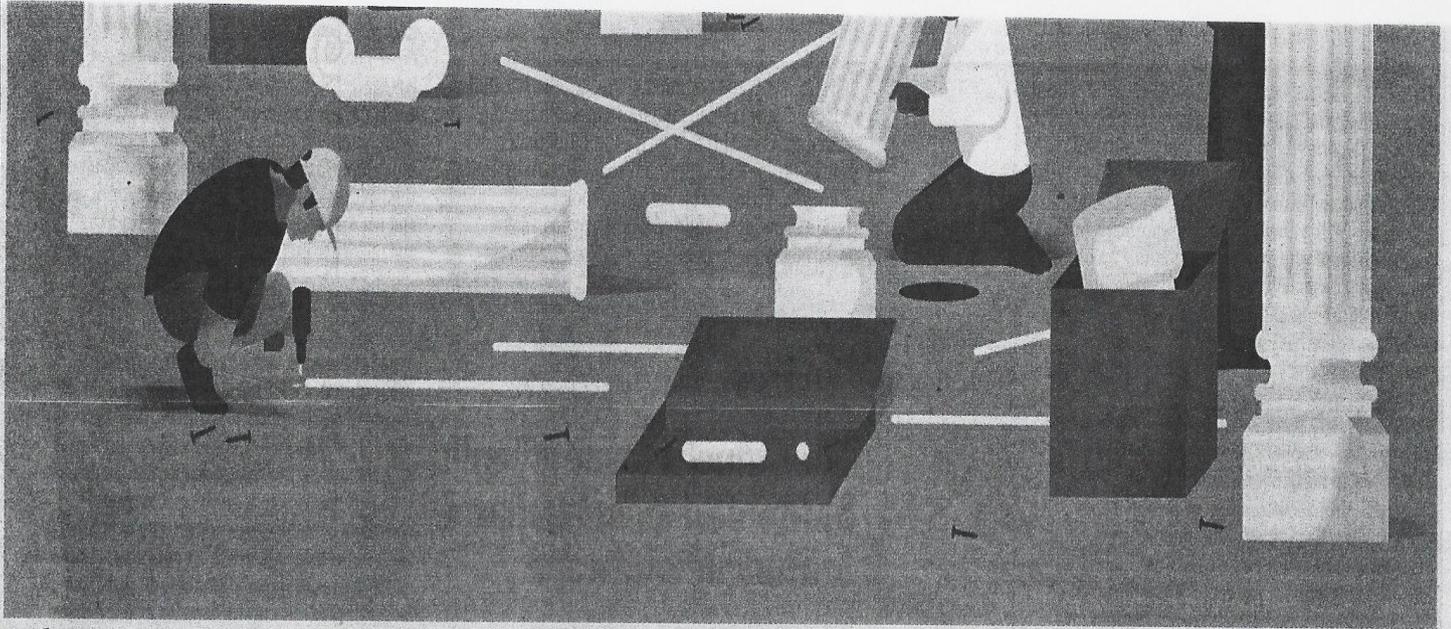


ILLUSTRATION:
NATHALIE LEES

The Covid-hit towns figuring out a new way to do politics

John Harris



About eight months ago, a fascinating social change began to ripple through hundreds of British neighbourhoods. Given the deluge of news that has happened since, it is easy to forget how remarkable it all seemed: droves of volunteers who were gripped by community spirit coming together to help deliver food and medicines to their vulnerable neighbours, check on the welfare of people experiencing poverty and loneliness, and much more besides. From a diverse range of places all over the country, the same essential message came through: the state was either absent or unreliable, so people were having to do things for themselves.

A couple of tantalising questions were triggered by all this. Would at least some of the energy and creativity that had been unleashed be sustained beyond the pandemic? And if that happened, might any of the people involved shift their attention to politics? Unfortunately, before anyone was started to become

in place. And, in some areas, what seems to have kept the early lockdown spirit intact is the fact that on-the-ground work has been based around town and parish councils that were once barely visible; these are now run by energised community activists who have used recent localism laws to push their work way beyond such staple responsibilities as parks and bus shelters. They're now blazing a trail for a new kind of ultra-local government.

I live in Frome in Somerset - where, in 2011, a town council with an annual budget of about £1m was wrested from the Tories and Lib Dems. A new group of self-styled independents began running things, with an accent on participation, sustainability, community wellbeing and the rejection of traditional party politics. The same basic idea has now spread to about 15 other places: its name, coined by an inspirational councillor called Peter Macfadyen, is "flatpack democracy".

In the first phase of the pandemic, the agile, open way that the town council now works came into its own. The town centre venue previously used for gigs and

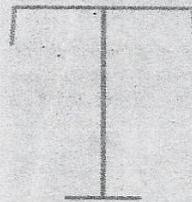


also includes help for local businesses, has carried on; the town council is now thinking hard about how to sustain it beyond the pandemic.

Something similar has happened in Queen's Park, the London "civil parish" where a new community council held its first elections six years ago. It has dedicatedly worked on helping people through the crisis. But perhaps the most vivid story of all is that of Buckfastleigh - a small Devon town on the edge of Dartmoor with high levels of deprivation, and a town council run by a new force called the Buckfastleigh Independent Group, whose prime mover is former civil servant Pam Barrett.

Devon county council, she told me last week, gave the town only £500 for Covid response work during the first lockdown, about 13p per resident. But by that point, the independent-run town council had already directed £20,000 into a relief programme that stretched from supplies of food and medicines, through activity books for local children; to YouTube videos capturing the start of spring for people trapped indoors.

Now, Barrett says, new parents are worrying that their babies are becoming toddlers without having meaningfully socialised with other children, so the council is turning its attention to early-years provision. "We don't have any public sector in Buckfastleigh any more," she explains: she and her colleagues are not just filling gaps left by austerity, but basically reinventing local government from the ground up.



here and elsewhere, the key story of the Covid crisis has been that of town and parish councils enabling people to participate in community self-help. But as Macfadyen, Barrett and other flatpackers see it, the next chapter is about moving in the opposite direction, and trying to get people who have been

involved in mutual aid to start running the places where they live. Elections for a huge number of town and parish councils are scheduled for May 2021. With that in mind, online launch meetings are now being organised to bring people together, and mentors are being put in touch with those who might fancy standing for office. There is an accompanying initiative, partly rooted in the activism around Extinction Rebellion, called Trust the People, which has just started running courses in grassroots democracy and how to get involved in local decision-making.

These are early, tentative moves. But even in more orthodox parts of politics, you sense something of the same mood. In the London borough of Barking and Dagenham, the Labour-run council has developed a new way of collaborating with voluntary and grassroots groups, an approach that was a huge help in dealing with the pandemic. From the other side of politics, it is worth reading a recent report by the Tory MP Danny Kruger, commissioned by the government to look at "sustaining the community spirit we saw during lockdown, into the recovery phase and beyond". Kruger proposes a new Community Power Act, using deliberative democracy, participatory budgeting and citizen assemblies "to create the plural public square we need".

Last week I spoke to Adam Hawley, a maths teacher who is trying to galvanise people to run for office in Hull, a city that has lately become a byword for the virus and the crisis it has caused. His focus goes beyond the town and parish level, to seats on the city council. Party politics, he says, seems "awful and embarrassing, and just unhelpful at a local level". He talks about people's experience of the Covid crisis, and "a sense that our institutions didn't know how to respond in a very direct, or even human way".

If the grassroots politics of 2020 can be boiled down to an essence, he says, it is "a big increase in the number of people getting involved in where they live, and looking for ways to do more of it". This sounds like a simple enough thing. But whether we can reshape our systems of power and politics to accommodate them strikes me as one of the key questions of this crisis, and the uncertain, turbulent future to come.

poverty

Page 51

What we are doing now and what we will need to do.

What are we facing

- The most recent poverty statistics are from 2018-2019.
- We look at relative low income, AFTER, housing costs are taken out.
- Incomes are falling faster at the bottom
- Particularly for single parents
- Or for families with a disabled person
- It costs more to be poor

What we are facing 2018-2019

- Families with children – **22- 30 in 100 families**
- Families with a disabled person- **26 in 100 families**
- Black families- **42 in 100**
- Pakistani families- **46 in 100**
- Bangladeshi families- **53 in 100**

Destitution

- Page 54 2.1m are now in destitution
- Of those 500K are children

**What next-
the Cliff Edge**

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30th April

Finish of Furlough

End of £20 uplift.

Poverty Governance and Structures

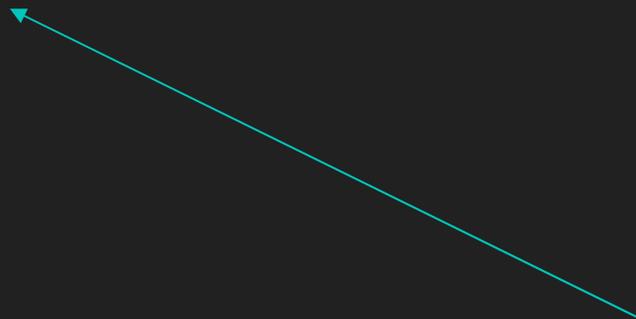
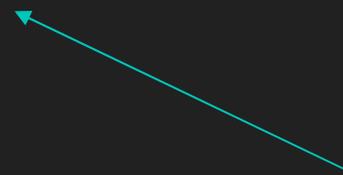
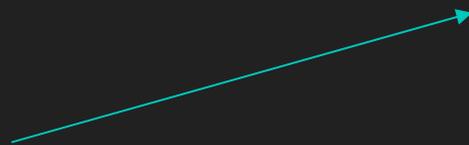
Oldham Leadership Board

Poverty Steering Group

Covid 19 portfolio

Poverty Agenda Group

Scrutiny



Line of sight

Fully
Independent^e

Crisis



Looking forward to the future

Improving confidence
Developing Skills

Access To employment

Confidence being built

Stabilising Health
and Home

- Maximising money in resident's pockets.
- Provide wrap around support.
- Aim to increase resident's confidence to "move up the ladder", a person centred approach.
- Ensure services do not disadvantage or further marginalise those on low incomes (poverty-proofing/socio-economic duty)

Suggested Actions

Page 59

Put together an Economic Strategy.

Look at routes out of poverty through Education.

Look at routes out of poverty through Employment.

Look at Council departments- poverty proofing

Poverty Truth Commission- need a culture of change.

Set up a support package.

Set up a front door for residents.

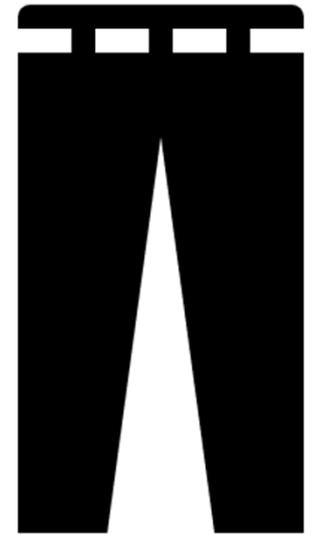
Improve our data collection.

Other actions

- Mapping of groups and charities.
- Strategic organisation, partnership working and place based working.
- Funding
- Local Welfare provision
- Policies - Oldham Poverty Framework
- Ward data
- Look at District working, and how we work with residents and our partners.

Clothes

Reel Clothes Rack
Charity shops



Fuel and Energy

Page 62



Warm Homes



Fuel Vouchers



Green Deal

Health

Page 63

Poorer people die
younger

Massive social isolation

Digital Exclusion

Page 64



Housing

Page 65



Food provision for residents

Page 66



Support and Finances

We have to put more money in peoples pockets.

Poor people cant save.

Money management advice is a must

Look at an open door policy for residents





0161 770 7007

Page 68

Where to get help and advice

Annual Holidays

Page 69



Thanks
Marcus

Page 70

“”

**THESE
CHILDREN
MATTER. THESE
CHILDREN ARE
THE FUTURE OF
THIS COUNTRY.
THEY ARE NOT
JUST ANOTHER
STATISTIC. AND
FOR AS LONG
AS THEY DON'T
HAVE A VOICE,
THEY WILL
HAVE MINE.**

MARCUS RASHFORD

