

# *Report to Overview and Scrutiny Board*

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

*Councillor Cath Ball, Deputy Cabinet Member (Poverty)*

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*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.*

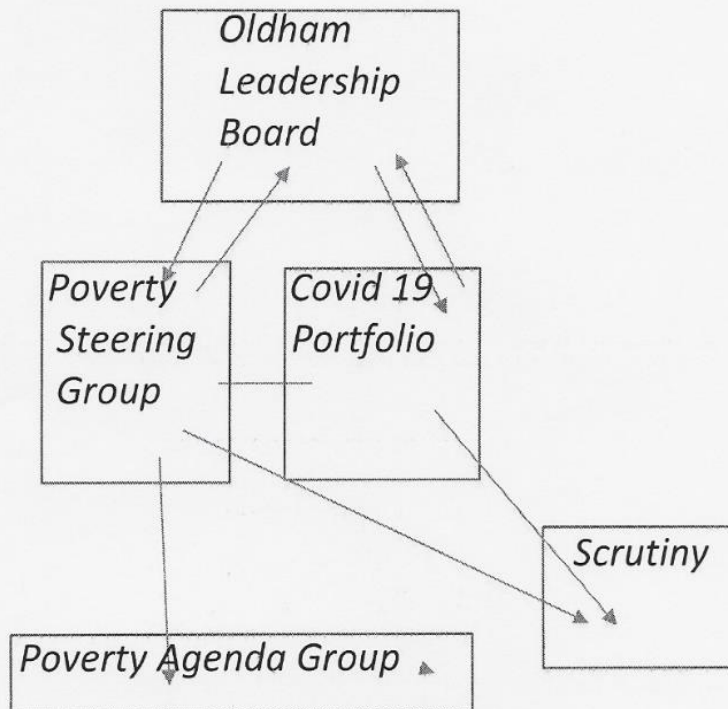
*We are mapping what groups are still working or are having Covid problems.*

*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.