

Report to **GOVERNANCE, STRATEGY AND RESOURCES**
SCRUTINY BOARD

Update on Oldham's Poverty Truth Commission

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21 March 2024

Reason for Decision

Oldham's Poverty Truth Commission brought people with lived experience of poverty together with local leaders to address the underlying causes of poverty. This report provides an update following the completion of the PTC in the at the end of 2022.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the report is noted, and further consideration given to support the ongoing work of the PTC through the Oldham Poverty Action Network (OPAN).

Update on Oldham's Poverty Truth Commission

1 Background

- 1.1 Poverty Truth Commissions (PTC) are a national model pioneered by the Poverty Truth Network. They seek to identify different approaches to addressing poverty through direct experience, strong relationships, and humanising people as well as systems.
- 1.2 Oldham's Poverty Truth Commission brought together a dozen people with lived experience of poverty alongside a dozen people with power, influence or authority from across a range of council and health services, businesses and voluntary sector. Its aim was to better understand the causes of poverty, the challenges it presents both for the people experiencing it and the wider system - and identify ways to address these.
- 1.3 The PTC was formally launched in September 2021 with seed funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and funding from Oldham Council and Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group. A copy of the PTC report is attached.
- 1.4 Modelling co-production from the start, colleagues at Shared Health and Action Together, Oldham's voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisation, worked for a year prior to the launch to recruit, support, and build the confidence and capacity of the lived experience commissioners to engage with and shape the PTC. This support continued throughout the process and was important for those commissioners still facing hardship and difficult circumstances, establishing relationships of trust as a solid foundation for their ongoing participation. The Council's Corporate Policy team similarly recruited and supported the engagement of the business and civic commissioners.
- 1.5 Over the next 12 months the PTC met regularly to define and address the issues they wanted to prioritise. Unlike many other PTC's Oldham focused on the identification of themes rather than specific target-driven projects, reflecting the commissioners' awareness of the need to tackle relational, structural and system barriers to achieve lasting change.
- 1.6 Three key themes were identified:
 - Welcoming points of contact: Services that have time to listen well and show understanding and empathy towards people who contact them for help.
 - Reducing stigma and raising hope: Helping to meet people's basic needs whilst also giving them opportunities to thrive and achieve.
 - Places of belonging, knowledge and hope: Places where people can belong to a supportive community
- 1.7 Embedding the 3 themes began whilst the PTC was still underway, the escalating Cost of Living crisis providing an opportunity to take forward "Welcoming Points of Contact". The grassroots commissioners co-designed and helped to deliver the borough's Cost of Living response, working alongside senior officers and customer-facing staff from a range of organisations at the Cost-of-Living Summit in July 2022, to produce an Action Plan to support residents through the winter.

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

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

2 Current Position

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

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

2.2 With a budget of £100,000 from Local Motion OPAN is able to test out ideas and develop proposals for longer term funding.

2.3 **Task Group 1** is focused on continuing the development and roll-out of the Oldham Community Advice Network, an online referral tool that brings together a range of crisis support providers and organisations in one system to ensure that residents who need help can access it easily and quickly, without having to re-tell their story. The system enables providers to indicate when they are at capacity so that residents can be re-directed for support elsewhere in the system.

2.4 **Task Group 2** is currently focused on developing a model of volunteering which will 'reclaim volunteering for people experiencing hardship' and begin to operationalise routes out of poverty using a strengths-based approach. The aim is to recognise the ways people in poverty often already participate in their communities and build on these strengths as a route out of spiralling hardship - whilst also improving their own skills, health and wellbeing. OPAN have recently recruited a Volunteering Officer with lived experience to work alongside clients and work coaches in Oldham Job Centre to advise on volunteering pathways as a way of accessing further training and employment

2.5 **Task Group 3** Continues to take forward the work of the PTC at a system level, building on the strategic links made by the lived experience commissioners through their engagement in the Planning for Real exercises and their direct engagement in the production of the Oldham Plan, the Council's Corporate Plan and other key strategies such as the Health Inequalities Action Plan. Currently members of OPAN are engaged in the development of the Oldham Systems Conditions Forum. The Forum is a newly

created space to explore and tackle system conditions that are preventing people moving out of poverty, involving people with lived experience equitably alongside system partners.

3. **Next steps**

- 3.1 Work continues to take forward the Task Groups through monthly meetings which are also attended by officers of the Council. This ensures that the Council continues to support the delivery of the workstreams and learns from and embeds co-production into its policy and practice. Action Together provide updates as appropriate regarding the work of OPAN to the Public Service Reform Board.

- 3.2 The lived experience commissioners remain supported by Action Together and Greater Manchester Poverty Action. Many of the individual Commissioners have and continue to experience positive outcomes from engagement with the PTC and OPAN through for example, volunteering, accessing employment or feeling more settled and supported to navigate the challenges they may still experience.

Their voices can be accessed through this link.

https://youtu.be/Ad7h_oiBktM?si=GM7SqEbu-4gXK3S7

3 **Appendices**

- 3.1 Oldham Poverty Truth Commission Report
PTC presentation slides