



Let's talk
Islington

Taskforce on Inequality in Islington

Final Report

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1. The taskforce

The Taskforce: why was it set up?

The Inequality Taskforce was established to develop recommendations for how Islington Council can go about addressing inequality, poverty and deprivation. It is a key part of the Let's Talk Islington engagement exercise with the borough's residents to discover their hopes and aspirations for Islington.

The Taskforce: members

Councillor Nurullah Turan (Taskforce Chair)

Executive Member for Health and Social Care and Ward Councillor for Laycock Ward, LB Islington

Councillor Jilani Chowdhury

Ward Councillor for Barnsbury Ward, LB Islington

Dr Miatta Fahnbulleh

Chief Executive Officer of the New Economics Foundation, an organisation committed to transforming the economy so it works for people and planet.

Clenton Farquharson MBE

Chair of the Think Local, Act Personal Partnership Board, SCIE trustee, member of the Coalition for Personalised Care, and the Social Care Sector COVID-19 Stakeholder Group.

Sam Gurney

London, East and South East Regional Secretary for the Trades Union Congress (TUC) which brings together more than 5.5 million working people who are members of 48 member trade unions.

Professor Donna Hall CBE

Chair of New Local, Chair of Bolton NHS Foundation Trust and Integrated Care System advisor to NHS England. Former Chief Executive of Wigan Council (2011-2019) where she developed 'The Wigan Deal'.

Councillor Gary Heather

Ward Councillor for Finsbury Park Ward, LB Islington

Annabelle Kapoor

Head of School at Drayton Park Primary School in Highbury, one half of Edventure Collaborative, a federation of two schools in the borough.

Navinder Kaur

Chief Executive of Voluntary Action Islington (VAI), which aims to lead and support a resilient local voluntary sector that actively collaborates to support residents and the community.

Dr Torange Khonsari

Researcher and Course Leader at London Metropolitan University in the field of Cultural and Civic Commons

Dr John McGrath

GP at Mildmay Medical Centre, Borough Clinical Lead NCL Integrated Care Board and co-Chair Islington Borough Partnership

Former Councillor Angela Picknell

Former Ward Councillor for St Mary's Ward, LB Islington

Dr Kelly Fagan Robinson

Leverhulme and Isaac Newton Trust ECR Fellow and Research Fellow and Postgraduate Tutor in the Department of Social Anthropology at Clare Hall, University of Cambridge.

Dr Ben Smith

GP Partner at Killick Street Health Centre in Barnsbury
Chair of the Islington GP Federation

Neil Tester

Former Director of the Richmond Group of Charities, a coalition of leading health and social care organisations in the voluntary sector and Former Deputy Director of Healthwatch England

The Taskforce: how it worked

- The taskforce met online and in five meetings – which included three three-hour workshops – over a period of nine months.
- The workshops were facilitated by Adam Lent, the Chief Executive of New Local – a think-tank specialising in community power. New Local also produced this report.
- Islington Council provided support by generating data and information required by the taskforce and presented the latest findings from the Let's Talk engagement exercise at each meeting. Particular thanks must go to Sal Asghar and Hayley Sims for providing this information in an exceptionally clear and timely fashion alongside the logistical support they gave.



2. Inequality in Islington

Inequality in Islington: the data

While Islington has some of the wealthiest residents and most expensive properties in the UK, it is also one of the most unequal and deprived boroughs.

- Islington is the 6th most deprived out of 32 London boroughs
- Islington is the 53rd most deprived borough in 2019 out of 317 local authorities in the UK
- Men living in the most deprived areas of Islington live on average 7.1 years less than those in the best off areas
- The death rate from avoidable causes is 80% higher amongst the most deprived residents compared to least deprived residents in the borough
- The unemployment rate was 4.4% in 2021/22, 1% higher than London as a whole
- Islington had the highest proportion of residents claiming sickness and disability benefits in London just before the pandemic with 55% of claims based on mental ill-health
- 34% of residents over 60 years of age live in low income households – double the England average
- 28% of residents under 16 live in low income households – the highest in London and 10th highest in England

Inequality in Islington: Let's Talk Findings

Islington residents are fully aware of the deprivation and inequality in the borough.

- 47% of respondents in a survey of 1,561 residents felt that Islington was not a fair and equal place – only 29% felt it was fair and equal
- Housing quality and affordability was strongly regarded as the major cause of deprivation and inequality with 70% identifying housing as the top priority for the borough
- 80% of those in the two lowest income brackets stressed housing as the top priority for Islington
- Residents who participated in community workshops run in partnership with local VCS bodies, also stressed housing but within a wider range of priorities including improved public services and better mental health support

Inequality in Islington: Let's Talk Findings

Some representative comments from the engagement exercise:

"There are **huge discrepancies in income and wealth** in the Borough and those with less income don't have **access** to all the opportunities and activities of those with high incomes."

"**The gap between the haves and have nots has accelerated** across the whole country in the last ten years and this is evident in Islington."

"Islington is very **polarized** between the very wealthy and poor. **Those in the middle (for example, teachers) are being squeezed out**, not being eligible for social housing or able to pay for private housing."

"I like the area well enough, but the **rent is so high for such tiny spaces**. My partner and I were dealing with this ok when we were at the office every day, but now ...we're stuck in our tiny apartment working from home with no extra budget to move it's miserable."

"**Even if your parents own their own home**, it's still not enough for children to buy in Islington. [...] **I do not think I'll be able to afford to live in Islington** once my parents sell our home to help their children get on their own property."

Everything is expensive – [it's] unaffordable for a single, elderly person to live in Islington and enjoy life, have money for leisure and wellbeing activities."

Inequality in Islington: the borough's assets

The Let's Talk programme also provided an insight into many of the positive aspects of living in Islington and the assets the borough enjoys:

- Many survey respondents and workshop participants felt that Islington was a vibrant, diverse and multicultural area with a **'welcome, open ethos'**.
- Respondents also highlighted **how Islington's 'local services are good'** and how Islington feels like a safe space for them and their families.
- Islington's residents felt **Islington had many assets and opportunities to tackle inequality** including civic education, developments of green space, creation of homes from underused buildings, in-school counselling, connections between schoolchildren and the older community, and many other ideas.

Inequality in Islington: more than money

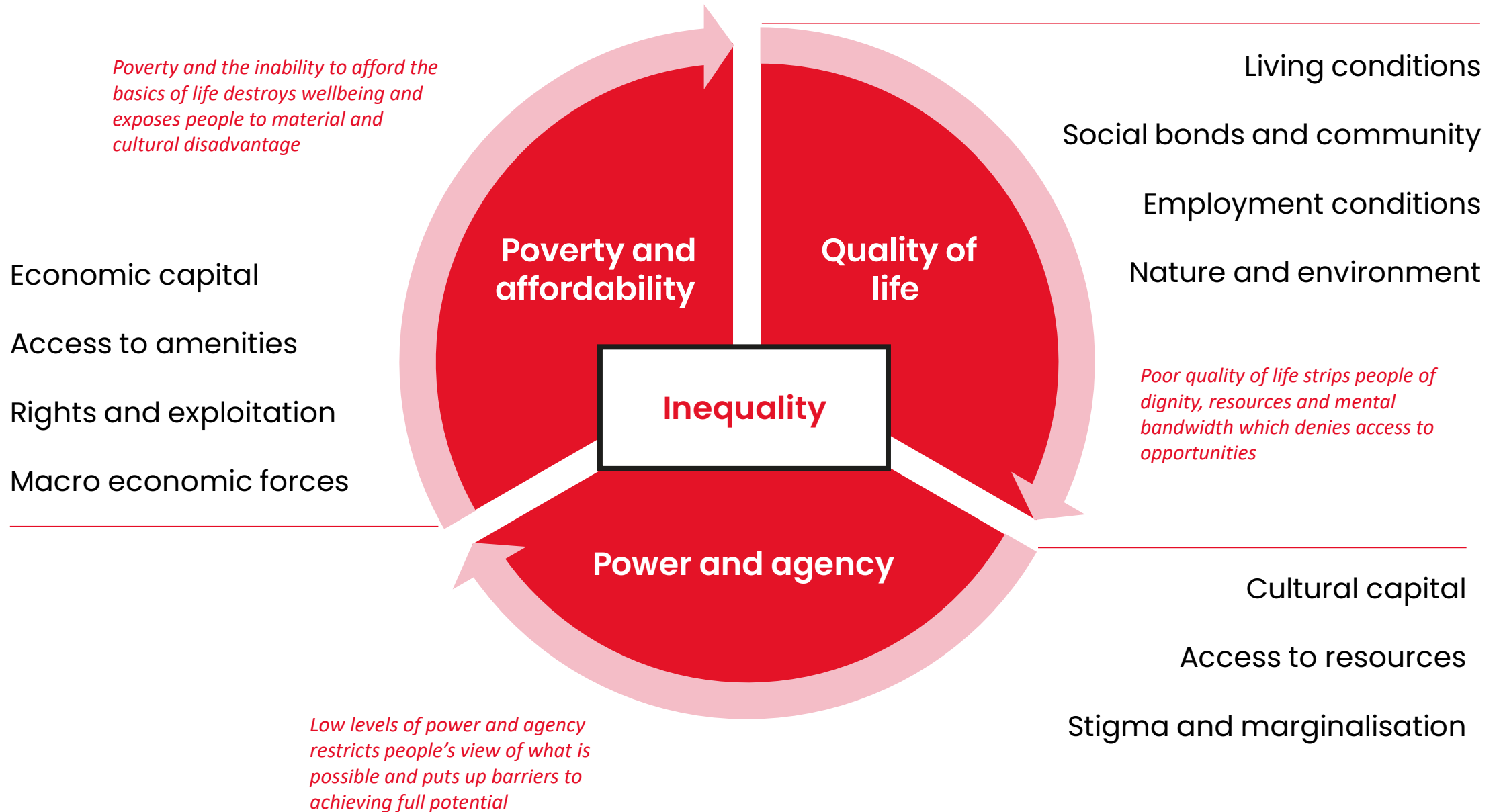
The taskforce agreed early in its deliberations that while income disparities are clearly central to inequality and deprivation, it is simplistic to see the issue only through a financial lens and that purely quantitative data can be misleading.

The taskforce emphasised four areas:

- Income inequality interacts in complex ways with **other forms of inequality** around gender, race, sexuality, disability and a range of other factors. These forms of inequality also interact with each other in complex ways.
- Inequality is about **power as well as money** – the less well-off lack the voice, influence and agency that the better-off can exercise far more easily.
- Those facing poverty are very widely **excluded from aspects of everyday life** that others take for granted such as leisure, cultural and community activities not purely because of lack of money but also due to discrimination, damaged self-confidence and a sense of shame.
- Those facing poverty endure **repeated indignities and hostility** from those with power or wider society such as the unreasonable conditions attached to benefit payments to discriminatory discourse and portrayals in the media and entertainment industries.

Inequality in Islington: the vicious circle

- This broader understanding makes clear that inequality goes well beyond a simple inability of those in poverty to buy necessities – it is a situation that deeply and negatively affects the identity, well-being and dignity of a large portion of our fellow citizens and Islington residents.
- It also allows us to appreciate what the taskforce described as the “vicious circle of inequality” in which the daily pressure of deprivation damages well-being on a range of measures leading to low self-confidence, physical and mental ill-health, a loss of agency and of influence – factors which then only exacerbate deprivation as individuals face ever higher barriers to securing decent work, consideration from those in positions of power and control over their future. This analysis is summarised in the diagram on the next slide.
- As will be shown, this understanding has important implications for how the Council should go about addressing inequality and deprivation in Islington.



Inequality in Islington: Research Evidence

This deeper appreciation of inequality and poverty accords closely with the direction of academic scholarship on the topic.

- The hugely influential work of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum has shifted the emphasis towards understanding poverty and inequality as a stunting of human potential rather than purely as a matter of daily subsistence. (Nussbaum & Sen 1993; Nussbaum 2000; Sen 1999, 2009)
- The work of Richard Sennet and Nancy Fraser has emphasised the way inequality leads to the withdrawal of respect and dignity from the less well-off seriously damaging their ability to influence those in power and participate in mainstream society. (Fraser 2008; Sennett 2003)
- In her work, Ruth Lister has stressed the role that lack of power and agency plays in perpetuating poverty and how those facing deprivation compensate for this in more or less positive and effective ways. (Lister 2021)
- While Keetie Roelen has specifically identified how the shame felt by those in poverty creates a self-reinforcing cycle of poverty and further shame. (Roelen 2017)
- Some of this shift has been informed by theoretical work but is increasingly being confirmed by new participatory research methods which place the voices of those in poverty at the heart of the research process as pioneered by ATD Fourth World and by the European Project on Poverty Indicators. (ATD Fourth World 1996, 2000, 2019; Harcourt 2003)

In short, there has been a major shift in recent years within academic research to understand poverty and inequality as shaped, perpetuated and exacerbated by a set of complex social, political and cultural relations rather than as solely an issue of income or wealth distribution. This has major implications for policy and for any steps that might be taken by a public sector body to address inequality.



3. Meeting the challenge

Meeting the Challenge: a tough issue

The systemic and highly complex nature of inequality makes it a particularly challenging issue for a local council to address. The challenge is further complicated by three other factors.

- Inequality in a single borough will be determined by national and global forces operating well outside the control of the council.
- The council is only one organisation in the borough amongst many others affecting the life of residents.
- The council's powers particularly on issues that could have a major bearing on inequality such as welfare, taxation and public spending are very limited.

Meeting the Challenge: the need for 'systemic focus'

- Given the complexity and the constraints, Islington Council will require clarity and focus in its efforts to address inequality and deprivation. Trying to address the problem as a whole will be to invite inevitable failure.
- However, that focus will also need to enable wider transformation across the whole system in Islington. Anything too narrow will lead to limited change and impact on the lives of residents.
- To that end the taskforce considered a range of issues upon which the council could focus such as housing, work, and well-being. But it was felt that all of these risked being too narrow and excluding key factors shaping inequality in the borough.

Meeting the Challenge: focusing on agency

- The taskforce proposes that an alternative focus for the council is to focus on the goal of significantly enhancing the sense of individual and collective agency in the borough particularly for those facing poverty and deprivation.

- Ruth Lister has described agency in the following way:

“The idea of agency is typically used to characterise individuals as autonomous, purposive and creative actors, capable of a degree of choice. A conscious sense of agency is important to an individual’s self-identity and sense of self-esteem. Survival in the face of oppression and deprivation is helped by a belief in the ability to exercise some measure of control over one’s own life, however limited.” (Lister 2021)

Meeting the Challenge: Why agency?

A focus on agency could have a particularly transformative and system-wide impact.

- Given the limited capacity of the council to directly improve the material conditions of the least well-off, a focus on individual and collective agency could, over time, stimulate significant shifts in how residents view themselves, their context and importantly, hopefulness for change. This could lay the foundations for greater efficacy of council and other efforts which seek to support residents, whether through encouraging participation in local community, accessing services, or take up of employment or other support that could improve the material conditions of life and reduce the wider effects of inequality.
- There is strong evidence that encouraging a sense of agency can significantly improve the poor mental health that very widely afflicts those facing poverty (Solomon 2001). It is notable that mental ill-health is by far the greatest cause of sickness and disability benefits claims in Islington.
- Regarding the council as a source of enhanced agency could also transform the working practices of the council itself. It could significantly aid the move away from older paternalistic practices and approaches which treat service users and residents either as passive 'cases' or, at worst, as problems to be managed – an approach that is increasingly recognised as ineffective and unsustainable across the public sector. Encouraging and supporting the council workforce to take on the role of facilitators and mobilisers of purposeful action by individuals and communities facing poverty would be a major cultural shift which would bring the wider benefits associated with a community power approach – detailed later in this report.

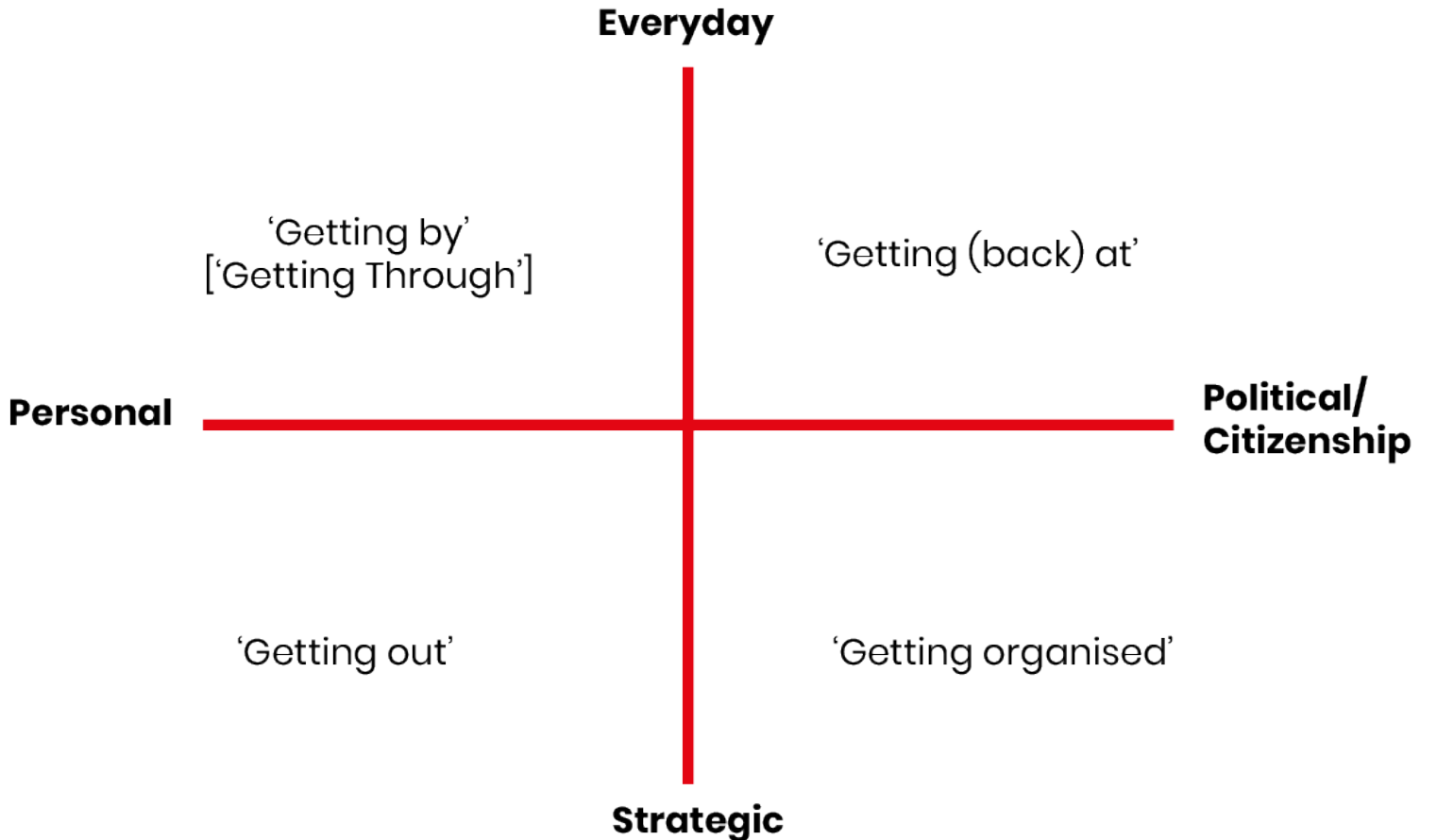
Meeting the Challenge: Why agency?

Within the academic literature, the role of agency in the battle against inequality and poverty is regarded as increasingly important. This has come from three perspectives.

- The recognition in recent years that poverty and inequality not only denies individuals the basic material necessities of life but also robs them of their ability to act as purposeful people with control over their lives able to participate fully in society. (See JRF 2016; Langmore 2000)
- The realisation that those facing poverty are experts in their own circumstances and that institutions – whether academic or governmental – have for too long denied those facing poverty the agency to shape the best understanding of and responses to inequality and deprivation. (See Beresford and Carr 2018; OHCHR 2004; Tomlin 2019; Wainwright 2018)
- The observation that those in poverty are not the passive subjects they are often portrayed as but in fact are, of necessity, very actively engaged in developing strategies to address their challenges on both a daily and more strategic level. (See Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin 2010; Lister 2021)
- The taskforce was also keen to highlight the way that a focus on agency can help address the intersectional nature of inequality by placing an emphasis on individuals and groups being empowered to address inequality on their own terms in all of its complexity.

Meeting the Challenge: Aspects of agency

Ruth Lister has developed a framework to understand how those facing poverty exercise their agency. This should prove useful to the council when developing its approach to enhancing the agency of residents.



Forms of agency exercised by people in poverty

Meeting the Challenge: Using the aspects of agency

Lister defines the four aspects of agency as follows:

Getting By: methods used to survive day-to-day and which range from very careful budgeting to maintaining a positive mind-set with a wide set of other methods being deployed.

Getting Back At: methods used to resist, challenge or undermine the causes of poverty or indignity – these range from ‘going through the motions’ demanded by benefit conditions to quitting low-paid and/or abusive work.

Getting Out: methods used to escape poverty such as enrolling on training courses or finding better-paid work.

Getting Organised: methods used to collectively address poverty through self-organisation such as mutual aid or to campaign for change such as demanding higher wages or improved welfare.

Meeting the Challenge: Using the aspects of agency

It is possible to imagine a programme developed by the council, designed in collaboration with those facing poverty in the borough, which would specifically aim to enhance agency under the getting by, getting out and getting organised aspects. It is the last of these that presents perhaps the most transformative potential for those facing poverty and more will be said about this under the heading of community power in the next section.

Meeting the Challenge: A word on language

- The word 'agency' as employed here is a piece of jargon that is not widely used outside the worlds of academia or policy-making.
- It is recommended that an alternative term or set of phrases are used when engaging with residents to avoid confusion.
- Much more commonly used words such as 'choice', 'control', 'power' and 'influence' used in appropriate contexts can convey the same meaning as agency.
- Of these words, 'influence' may be the most useful conveying both influence over one's own life but also over the decisions taken by others that can affect one's life. Focus group work on community power conducted by New Local found that the concept of having influence was more positively received than 'control' and 'power' which generated some negative connotations. However, influence is far from a perfect synonym for agency and it will be important for the council and partners to use words carefully and in appropriate contexts to convey the full sense of what it wishes to achieve with communities.
- It is also important to keep in mind that agency can often imply an individualised notion of influence or control. As the next section of this report makes clear, an emphasis on agency achieved through collective action will be a central feature of any attempt to address inequality and poverty in the borough.



4. A Community Powered Approach

A Community Powered Approach: What is Community Power

- As defined by New Local, community power is the idea that local communities should have much greater influence and control over the plans, decisions, and public services that affect their lives.
- Community power is increasingly influential as a public service reform agenda. It is regarded as a way of reducing service demand while also mobilising the assets of a whole place at a time of constrained public sector resources and formidable challenges such as widening inequality and climate change. (Lent & Studdert 2019; Lent, Pollard & Studdert 2022; Pollard, Studdert & Tiratelli 2021)

A Community Powered Approach: why?

- A focus on agency and particularly the 'getting organised' aspect of agency naturally implies a more community powered approach to addressing inequality and poverty. Agency and community power are obvious partner ideas both emphasising the central role of residents in shaping services and meeting challenges while reorienting council organisational culture away from a top-down, paternalistic approach towards a much more bottom-up, collaborative approach.
- Community power also has an important role in attempts to address inequality and poverty. Recent research has shown that the offer of participation in the decisions that affect people's lives and the respect this implies is not only a widespread demand of people facing poverty but can also be transformative in itself improving self-confidence and a sense of agency (ATD Fourth World 2014; McKenzie 2015; Peel 2003; Soss 1999).

A Community Powered Approach: why?

- There is a growing recognition that contrary to older paternalist models which emphasised the role of the professional expert, people in poverty are often the most important source of expertise in both the conditions they face and the possible solutions to those conditions. A number of pilot schemes and research projects have shown that the effectiveness of anti-poverty policy and interventions are significantly enhanced when those in poverty are directly involved in the design and delivery of those initiatives (ATD Fourth World 1996, 2000; Bray et al. 2019; Brun 2007; Donald & Mottershaw 2009, 2014; McGee 2002)
- Research has also revealed that social networks are extremely important to those facing poverty as a source of advice, mutual support and practical help. However, as the survey on Poverty and Social Exclusion concluded “poverty increases the importance of, and likely need for, social networks and social support, while simultaneously eroding them” (Wilson et al, 2018). Thus, community power with its emphasis on mobilising networks and enabling mutual support can play a key role in addressing a particularly malign aspect of deprivation: the need for but simultaneous erosion of social networks.

A Community Powered Approach: Why? – practical experience

- At the heart of a community powered approach is the idea of letting communities themselves – those with lived experience – shape the decisions that affect their lives.
- An increasingly popular way for councils to engage those from deprived communities into strategic decision-making is through poverty truth commissions.
- These differ from conventional commissions in that at least half of the members of the commission come from communities facing poverty in a council's area. This places those commission members in a position of influence from which they are usually excluded as described throughout this report.
- Poverty truth commissions have two main and distinct impacts: on the commissioners themselves and on the nature of the decisions taken by commissions.
- Commissioners themselves have reported improved self-confidence, building stronger, lasting connections with others involved in the commission and even significant changes in material circumstances such as finding employment.
- The decisions and changes initiated by commissions tend to focus on the necessity of empowerment, agency and a shift to person-centred services rather than top-down reforms focused solely on officers and financial solutions. For example: Wolverhampton mental health services shifted to a strengths-based, person-centred approach following a commission in the area; a social housing provider reduced evictions by 75% by focusing on well-being and early intervention for tenants – a recommendation arising from a local commission.

A Community Powered Approach: Why? – practical experience

- Another area that has shifted in recent years towards allowing communities to lead decision-making and agenda-setting is academic research into poverty.
- Increasingly, this area of research has moved away from treating those in poverty as 'subjects' of research to creating processes that let them shape the research themselves.
- As with poverty truth commissions, this has significantly enhanced the focus of research onto the importance of agency and empowerment as a route out of poverty and its consequences rather than the previous focus on purely material issues.
- The homelessness charity Groundswell has taken this approach in its research. The work has found that those facing homelessness emphasise the importance of personal relationships, empowerment through collective action and peer support rather than simply finding a place to live as the key to change in their lives.

A Community Powered Approach: Why? – practical experience

A video produced by ATD Fourth World powerfully summarises how an empowering approach to engaging with those facing poverty can lead to a much greater sense of agency and increased self-confidence.

The video can be viewed by using this link: [The Roles We Play: A Method of Genuine Participation - YouTube](#)

A Community Powered Approach: case studies

The following slides present four brief case studies of community power to illustrate the approach further. Two are from Islington itself and two from further afield.

A Community Powered Approach: Islington case study – We Are Cally

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A Community Powered Approach: Islington case study – We Are Cally

- An initiative launched around the Caledonian Road area of Islington (known as The Cally) – an area of high density estates with considerably lower employment and life expectancy than the wealthier parts of the borough.
- A community plan has been produced by local residents following a six month participation process facilitated by the council which ended in March 2021.
- The plan commits the council to work in collaboration with Cally residents to deliver against five goals such as a stronger community, better opportunities for young people and improved health and well-being.
- While the council has committed funds to help deliver against these goals, there is a clear understanding that this is a community power initiative in which Cally residents themselves take the leading role in driving improvement. To that end, a grants fund has been established by the council to support community-led initiatives in The Cally.
- While the council is investing in improvements to a community centre, library and park, residents are active in establishing mutual aid groups, managing green spaces and launching other activities around craft, cooking and planting.

A Community Powered Approach: Islington case study – Good Neighbours Scheme



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A Community Powered Approach: Islington case study – Good Neighbours Scheme

- Running for ten years, the Good Neighbours Scheme (GNS) was launched by Islington-based VCS group, Help on Your Doorstep to counteract rising levels of isolation.
- Working at a hyperlocal level, the GNS supports residents to organise meet-ups and other activities for those feeling disconnected from community life, friends and support. The GNS also offers help for groups, volunteers and residents in identifying and accessing grant-funding, support, activities and other resources.
- GNS now runs in three areas of Islington: Bemerton, Canonbury and Kings Cross.
- To date GNS has supported over 1000 community events. In 2021/22, GNS events attracted 768 people including 436 new participants.

A Community Powered Approach: UK case study – Ambition Lawrence Weston



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A Community Powered Approach: UK case study – Ambition Lawrence Weston

- Initially mobilised around food poverty, Ambition Lawrence Weston has developed into a highly active and wide-ranging community initiative in an area of high unemployment on the outskirts of Bristol.
- The initiative is entirely run by the residents of the Lawrence Weston estate with support from Bristol City Council and a growing range of other partners such as the National Lottery.
- Activities have included securing the development of a low-price supermarket in the area, launching community transport schemes, re-opening a community centre, opening two playgrounds, establishing a community-owned solar farm and wind turbine, and undertaking home improvements including energy efficiency.
- All activities are part of a long-term Community Plan developed independently by Lawrence Weston residents

A Community Powered Approach: UK case study – Healthier Fleetwood



Let's talk
Islington

A Community Powered Approach: UK case study – Healthier Fleetwood

- Initially launched by a local GP, Healthier Fleetwood is now a major community-led effort to improve mental and physical health in one of the most deprived parts of the UK.
- A wide variety of groups have been established including weekly singing, men's mental health, walking, women's craft and creativity and a range of others. All are run by Fleetwood residents themselves with support from the district and town councils and the primary care network.
- Many of these groups focus on ending isolation and depression rather than directly on health. Nevertheless, Fleetwood has seen reductions in obesity and falls in demand for A&E.



5. Measuring impact

Measuring Impact: a plural approach

- The taskforce felt strongly that the council should take a rigorous and sustained approach to measuring its impact in addressing inequality and poverty through the enhancement of agency.
- This measurement needs to take an approach combining quantitative with qualitative methods and drawing on the 'lived experience' of those facing poverty and inequality.
- This 'plural' approach is required to ensure that measurement does not become a substitute for analysis and understanding but also to ensure that the voices of those affected by any initiative are always front and centre from design right through to measurement and reflection.
- This also accords with academic research which has found that poverty and inequality are more accurately understood when a variety of methods are employed (Bradshaw & Finch 2003).

Measuring Impact: making it happen

- Currently, the council collects a range of quantitative and qualitative data to meet a range of different objectives. Some of this relates to issues of inequality but not as part of a coordinated effort to gather such information. Much of it also provides a snapshot of conditions in the borough rather than indicating trend and impact over time.
- The Taskforce recommends that the council reviews its data collection in order to release resource and capacity to focus on the publication of an annual report on inequality and poverty in the borough. This should take the plural approach detailed above and place a strong emphasis on assessing progress and impact.
- The process of producing the report should also include time for reflection by senior councillors and officers on progress and changes that need to occur to enhance impact. The outcomes of these reflections should be included in the report.

Measuring Impact: lived experience

- The taskforce is keen to stress the importance of drawing lived experience into the process of measurement. This emphasis is based on two observations.
- Firstly, that reducing the experience of inequality and poverty to a purely statistical or academic subject has contributed in the past to the 'othering' of people facing poverty reducing their humanity and thus marginalising them further (Lister 2021).
- Secondly, close engagement with those facing poverty characterised by 'attentive listening' (McIntosh & Wright 2019) on the part of those in power has been shown to improve the accuracy of analysis and the efficacy of resulting initiatives (Patrick 2020; Robb 2002).
- In practice, this means going beyond the usual methods of qualitative data gathering usually based on semi-structured interviews and focus groups to greater use of personal testimony, ethnographic methods based on open discussion and deep listening and participatory techniques such as community-led research. Some of these have been used as part of the Let's Talk Islington engagement exercise and should be incorporated into ongoing measurement and evaluation processes.

Measuring Impact: what would success look like

- The taskforce feels it is important that the council develops a clear sense of what success might look like over a period of time regarding any effort to address inequality and poverty in the borough.
- This is vital in order to judge progress towards a clear goal.
- In addition, this will allow the council to consider what is genuinely achievable. As mentioned above, the council's capacity to influence income levels and the distribution of wealth in the borough is very limited with such powers held at national level. But the council does have the power to listen closely and work out shared plans of action with communities facing poverty or deprivation to deliver considerable improvements in their lives and even attract extra external resource to support those communities. Being clear about this goal will be fundamental to the success of any initiative and to identify what exactly needs to be measured.
- As the author and activist bell hooks argued, tackling inequality is not purely about material redistribution, it is also a battle for representation, recognition and respect. It is in this latter sphere that Islington council can have its greatest impact.



6. Practical steps

Practical Steps

Based on the above considerations, the taskforce suggests the council takes the following practical steps:

1. Identify the full range of communities the council would hope to work in partnership with as part of an initiative to address inequality and poverty. These communities should cover relatively small geographical areas and should be based on localities that have resonance with its residents as in the case of We Are Cally.
2. Given limited resources, the council should sequence this partnership working based on triage criteria. The full sequence may well stretch over a number of years. The nature of this triage criteria will need to be determined through further consideration but aspects might include the degree of deprivation, community activity or geography with a focus in the latter case on creating links between separate mobilised communities in a particular part of the borough.

Practical Steps

3. Drawing on the experience of We Are Cally and the other community powered initiatives from outside Islington, the council should initiate an open conversation with residents in the identified communities. Based on current best practice, these conversations should be initially agendaless and should employ deliberative techniques. The design should be heavily focused on enhancing agency by allowing the community to shape and lead the conversation. These approaches have already been employed by the council as part of the Let's Talk Islington engagement – the lessons and skills emerging from that process should be used at the initial stages of this initiative.
4. This initiative should be undertaken in as close partnership as possible with the wider public sector and voluntary sector in Islington. In particular, the growing emphasis in the NHS on population health, inequality and economic improvement means there is an important opportunity to join forces. This close working means extra resource can be brought to the effort but also means that the council and partners will be better placed to support and respond to the issues communities wish to focus upon. Experience of community powered initiatives elsewhere shows that community concerns are very commonly systemic in nature requiring an integrated rather than siloed response from the public and voluntary sector.

Practical Steps

5. While the ultimate goal should be to mobilise communities themselves to address the challenges they face, it is likely that initial concerns will be 'bread and butter' problems requiring council attention. The council should be ready to respond to these problems as rapidly as possible to build trust with the community.
6. It is inevitable that some communities will take far longer to mobilise than others. The council and partners should be ready to commit to what might be a very long-term and iterative process of building trust, confidence and capabilities within some communities. It should also be kept in mind that different individuals or parts of communities will be more willing and able to engage than others. There will need to be a sustained and methodical effort to reach out to *all* parts of a community. This is particularly important with regard to ensuring that engagement does not reinforce or exacerbate the inequalities that exist within and between communities. Establishing a group of 'community champions' from within communities themselves to do this outreach has proved particularly effective elsewhere.

Practical Steps

7. The council may wish to develop a dedicated team to lead this work; alternatively it may draw on staff from across various teams. Whichever is chosen, it is vital that those working with communities have the necessary skill-sets to initiate and develop open conversations and then implement the agreed courses of action that emerge. The council may wish to contract external organisations to provide training and support for staff members working on the initiative. The taskforce was keen to emphasise that the success of this initiative will be very strongly determined by the successful building of capabilities within communities and the development of capability-building skills within the council and public sector.
8. At a certain point, it may be felt valuable to bring mobilised communities together to identify how they might support each other and collaborate on wider initiatives across the borough.

Practical Steps

9. Begin impact measurement and evaluation from the earliest stage of the initiative to create baselines against which progress can be assessed. Employ the plural approach outlined above and refine the process of measurement and evaluation as the initiative progresses drawing particularly on the insights and lived experience of the partner communities.
10. Ensure the learning from the initiative is captured and shared across the whole council, public sector and voluntary sector workforce and is used as a guide to the wider transformation of working practices and culture to place agency and community power increasingly at the heart of everything the council and wider public sector and voluntary sector does. Ultimately, the goal must be to make the enabling of agency a recognised responsibility across the whole system within the borough.

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