

# Working together to tackle poverty in Lewisham

The final report of the  
Lewisham Poverty Commission

October 2017

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## Foreword

Lewisham is a great place to live, with a strong and diverse community. Yet, despite being situated in the heart of London, on the doorsteps of one of the wealthiest cities in the world, tens of thousands of Lewisham residents live in poverty.

There is a wealth of evidence of the damage poverty does. We know child poverty is associated with lower educational achievement, and it prevents kids from fulfilling their potential. We know poverty is linked to poor physical and mental health, and to shorter life expectancy. We know poverty is often inter-generational, with people growing up poor being more likely to suffer from poverty later in life. And we know that high levels of inequality; with significant wealth alongside poverty, is a cause of significant social ills. A fundamentally unequal society can never be a good society.

Lewisham has a proud record of fighting poverty. We are proud that we were the first council to become an accredited Living Wage employer, and since we introduced a business rate incentive, the number of Living Wage employers locally has rocketed. We've seen strong employment growth, with the Council helping hundreds of residents into work in recent years.

Yet despite our efforts, poverty in Lewisham remains stubbornly high. And we know things may get worse. The Government's failure to tackle the housing crisis has been a driver of poverty in London. Their welfare freeze has led directly to an increase in poverty both for those who can't work, and those in work on low pay. And the Government's huge cuts to Lewisham Council's funding limit what we can do to tackle poverty.

But we know there is more that we can do. That's why the Safer Stronger Select Committee called for a Commission to review our approach. This report is the outcome of the Lewisham Poverty Commission. It has involved a new approach; with Councillors working alongside local stakeholders and national experts to look at the nature of poverty in Lewisham, assess what we're currently doing and what other councils are doing, and develop a comprehensive plan to tackle the scourge of poverty. We've spoken to residents affected by poverty, we've sought input from across the community, and we've come up with some recommendations which we think are ambitious but practical and which we hope can make a real difference.

We've focused on four areas; supporting residents to access decent work; tackling child poverty; improving the local housing market; and strengthening support within communities. In each area, we've made recommendations which we hope the current Mayor and the next Mayor will implement. But we can't do this alone. If we are to make a real impact, we will need to work with local partners, and we will need to continue to push for changes in Government policy.

I am grateful to Safer Stronger Select Committee for proposing this commission, to our Mayor Sir Steve Bullock for asking me to Chair it, to everyone who fed in and to our fantastic officers for their support – particularly Simone van Elk. But most of all, I'm hugely grateful to all our commissioners who gave their time and their significant expertise.

We all share a commitment to tackling poverty. It's what drives us. We hope that the work of the Lewisham Poverty Commission can help us tackle the scourge of poverty in our community.



Councillor Joe Dromey, Chair of the Lewisham Poverty Commission

## 1. Introducing the Poverty Commission: a realistic but ambitious approach

### The Commission

Tackling poverty, deprivation and inequality is at the heart of Lewisham Council’s vision for a resilient, healthy and prosperous borough. With this in mind, Lewisham Council agreed to convene the Lewisham Poverty Commission to understand and tackle the poverty faced by residents and communities in Lewisham, bringing Council representatives together with partner organisations of the Council.

The Commission is a group of local councillors and poverty experts that have come together to consider how poverty can be tackled in the borough. Its members are:

Alice Woudhuysen (Child Poverty Action Group)	Bharat Mehta (Trust for London)
Bill Davies (Central London Forward)	Councillor Brenda Dacres
Claire Mansfield (New Local Government Network)	Councillor Colin Elliot
Debbie Weekes-Bernard (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)	Gloria Wyse (Lewisham Citizens)
Councillor James J-Walsh	Councillor Joan Millbank
Councillor Joe Dromey ( <i>Chair</i> )	Councillor Joyce Jacca
Dr Simon Griffiths (Goldsmiths)	

### Focusing on poverty

Poverty is complex and multidimensional. The Commission has used the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s definition, where poverty is a situation in which ‘a person’s resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation)’.<sup>1</sup> In this definition, ‘needs’ encompass both basic material goods and the ability to participate in social life. The term ‘resources’ refers to the financial and in-kind means necessary to meet these needs. In-kind resources may be formal goods and services (those provided by a local authority, for example) or informal goods and services (accessed via social networks or community organisations, for example).

The principal aim of the Commission has been to agree recommendations to alleviate poverty in Lewisham, mitigate against its negative effects and strengthen people’s resilience.

The Commission has prepared this final report following several months of research and public consultation. The process involved a qualitative study of the lived experience of poverty in Lewisham; analysis of quantitative data and existing literature on poverty; discussions at local assemblies across the borough; an online consultation; a summit which brought together communities and wider stakeholder representatives from across the borough.<sup>2</sup> This report summarises the Commission’s findings on poverty in Lewisham and presents their recommendations to the Council and partners.

### The role of Lewisham Council in tackling poverty

Many of the Commission’s recommendations are naturally directed at Lewisham Council. The Commission recognises that local authorities have a significant impact on the lives of their residents through the many services they provide, commission and facilitate – examples include children’s centres, the provision of temporary accommodation and employment support programmes. The Commission also recognises the good work Lewisham Council has been doing for many years to tackle poverty and support its residents who are dealing with the consequences. However a local authority by itself can only do so much, particularly given the government’s deep cuts to local government budgets

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/definition-poverty>.

since 2010; cuts which are set to continue. In this context, the Commission has worked to create recommendations to the Council that are ambitious but realistic.

### Action at a local level

The borough contains many significant publicly funded institutions aside from the Council including a world class university, social housing providers, a large further education college as well as a large NHS trust. All provide important services for the citizens of Lewisham including education, housing and care. These organisations also make up a significant proportion of local employment and are significant sources of investment in the local area. The Commission has therefore also looked at positive steps these organisations, together with the Council, can take to tackle poverty.

### Working together to tackle poverty

The Commission has been keenly aware that local authorities also have a significant role to play in their local area by bringing local partners together to tackle pressing issues. This report therefore sets out ambitious actions for Lewisham Council and other local partners which we hope can make a real difference to the lives of local people.

Nevertheless there are limits to what local organisations can do by themselves to tackle the problem of poverty in Lewisham. Some of the barriers faced by the poorest Lewisham residents can only be removed through changes in policy by national government. The Commission therefore also calls on national government to play their part: to support people that desperately need it and to create the conditions that enable individuals, local communities and local organisations to solve poverty.

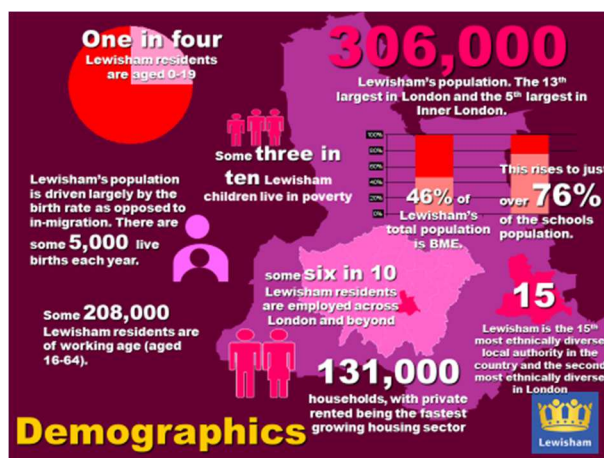
Poverty can be tackled but only if we all work together.

## 2. Poverty in Lewisham

### Lewisham and its people

Lewisham is a successful, diverse and inclusive inner London borough. The borough has good transport links to the rest of London, excellent primary and improving secondary schools, attractive residential neighbourhoods and an active voluntary and community sector.

Lewisham has a population of 306,000 people. It is the 15<sup>th</sup> most ethnically diverse borough in the country. From the 2011 Census, 46.4% of Lewisham's people are from a Black, Asian, and, Minority Ethnic (BAME) background. 14.4% of Lewisham's residents described themselves as living with a long-term health condition in the Census, compared to 17.6% for England. It also a very young borough as a quarter of its residents are less than 20 years old. Lewisham is characterised by the energy and diversity of its local communities and shares several characteristics with both inner and outer London. Yet, despite its many assets and rich history as a leader in debates surrounding social justice, Lewisham continues to have high levels of poverty and deprivation.



### The impacts of poverty

There is a wealth of evidence of the negative impact of poverty on people's lives.

#### *Educational attainment and intergenerational poverty*

Children growing up in poverty have far poorer educational outcomes than other children. Pupils who receive free school meals (FSM) are significantly less likely to achieve good GCSE results. In England, 43.1% of children on FSM score a grade C or better for English and maths GCSEs, compared to 63% of all children. The numbers in Lewisham are 45.9% for children on FSM compared to 56.2% overall.<sup>3</sup> Nationally, just one in five (22%) young people on FSM progresses to university, compared to two in five (39%) young people who did not receive FSM.<sup>4</sup>

Partly as a result of the large gaps in educational attainment between those who grow up in poverty and those who don't, there are high levels of intergenerational transmission of poverty, where poverty is transferred from one generation to the next,<sup>5</sup> and low levels of social mobility in the UK.<sup>5</sup>

Children growing up in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods in the UK are at least 10 times more likely to be taken into care or put on a child protection plan than children in the 10% least deprived

<sup>3</sup> Department for Education, 2016 at <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/>

<sup>4</sup> Department for Education (DfE), Widening participation in Higher Education, England, 2016

<sup>5</sup> Office for National Statistics, Intergenerational transmission of disadvantage in the UK and the EU, Sept 2014

neighbourhoods<sup>6</sup>. In Lewisham, the number of looked after children per 10,000 population is 65.1, compared to 60 nationally<sup>7</sup>.

### *Physical health and life expectancy*

People who are poor tend to die younger than people who are not. In England, the wealthiest women live on average 6.6 years longer than the most deprived. For men, the gap is 7.7 years.<sup>8</sup> This is particularly relevant for homeless people who are sleeping rough. Their average life expectancy is 42, compared to 79 for women and 76 for men nationally.

Poverty also has a significant impact on people's physical health. People living in poverty have increased rates of cardio-vascular diseases and lung cancer as well as respiratory illnesses related to cold housing.

### *Mental health and wellbeing*

Reduced income, income inequality, unemployment and unaffordable housing have all been associated with poor mental and physical health outcomes.

Stress, anxiety, depression, substance misuse disorders and minor psychiatric illnesses have all been linked to different aspects of living in poverty, such as being in debt, experiencing a decrease in household income or being unemployed. Some studies have shown that the risk of death by suicide was two to three times higher for unemployed people compared to those with jobs.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, those working in insecure and low-paid jobs are more at risk of suffering from stress, and job insecurity has been strongly associated with depression.<sup>10</sup> This was born out in interviews with Lewisham residents and community organisers:

*'People begin at a place where they, you know, if they got a job they probably wouldn't be able to cope because they don't have the correct coping strategies around anxiety, around saying what they think, around turning up for things on time, that kind of thing. And a lot of that is around mental health... I mean some weeks we'll have hardly anyone here and when you ask people why, it's because they were really depressed and they couldn't get out of bed or that kind of thing.'*

Reverend, Church in Downham

## Quantifying poverty in Lewisham

Lewisham is situated close to the centre of London, one of the wealthiest cities in the world. Yet as with many London boroughs, Lewisham's community still suffers from high levels of poverty and inequality.

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<sup>6</sup> The Child Welfare Inequalities Project, led by Coventry University at <http://www.coventry.ac.uk/Global/08%20New%20Research%20Section/Researchers/CCSJ/CWIP%20Summary%202015.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Report on Lewisham Council's children's social care budget from September 2017 at <http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s52583/04%20Childrens%20social%20care%20budget%20270917.pdf>

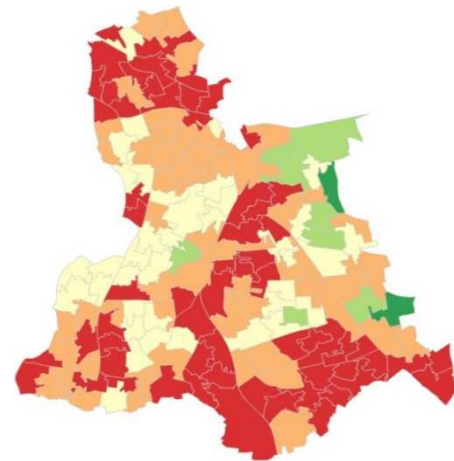
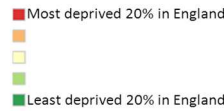
<sup>8</sup> Public Health England, 2016

<sup>9</sup> Giuntoli, 2011 at <https://www.irf.org.uk/sites/default/files/irf/migrated/files/unemployment-mental-health-full.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> The Marmot review, 2010 at <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/fair-society-healthy-lives-full-report.pdf> and Meltzer et al (2010) *Job insecurity, socio-economic circumstances and depression* in Psychological Medicine.



According to the Department for Communities and Local Government’s 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), the borough ranked 48<sup>th</sup> out of 326 local authorities (1<sup>st</sup> being most deprived). This is a marked improvement from 2011 when it was ranked 31<sup>st</sup>, yet Lewisham remains well within the most deprived quartile of local authorities.

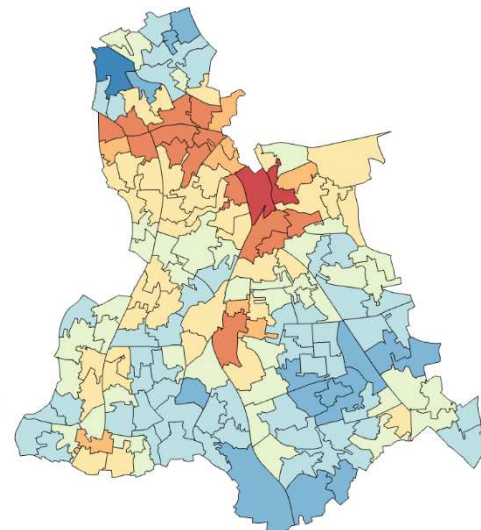
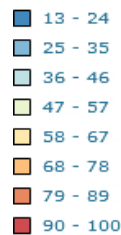


There are significant variations by area in Lewisham. Two of Lewisham’s neighbourhoods are in the least deprived 20% in the country, while 63 of the borough’s communities (37%) are in the 20% most deprived in the country. Areas of significant wealth exist alongside areas with high levels of deprivation. There are concentrations of deprivation in the far north and the far south of the borough.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 2.** A map showing Lewisham’s Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) scores by LSOA<sup>12</sup> (Source: DCLG 2015).

In the Trust for London’s 2017 London Poverty Profile, Lewisham ranked among the bottom 25% of all 32 London boroughs for the average across all indicators. The Trust noted that Lewisham is in the worst four boroughs for numbers of out-of-work benefit claimants, the average size of income loss from Council tax support and proportion of 19 year olds lacking level 3 qualifications<sup>13</sup>. The borough was worst amongst London Boroughs for pupils receiving A\*-C grades in English and maths.<sup>14</sup>

In the north of the borough, high housing costs and low incomes combine to produce high levels of deprivation, but there are good connections to the rest of London. In the south, housing tends to be marginally more affordable but incomes are low and residents are more likely to be unemployed and in receipt of out-of-work benefits. One of the key challenges across the south of the borough is poor transport connectivity, with low Public Transport Accessibility Levels (PTALs)<sup>15</sup>, as illustrated by Figure 3. There is a significant overlap between poor transport accessibility and concentrations of deprivation in the borough.



**Figure 3.** A map showing PTAL’s across Lewisham.

‘The cost of public transport’ [makes it difficult to get by] *Grove Park Local Assembly*

<sup>11</sup> The IMD measures relative deprivation across 7 domains: income; employment; education, training and skills; health deprivation and disability; crime; barriers to housing and other services; and the living environment.

<sup>12</sup> Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are geographical areas with an average population of 1,500 people used in the IMD. Lewisham has 169 LSOAs spread across 18 wards.

<sup>13</sup> For information, level 3 qualifications are, or are similar in level to A-levels. For details of what different qualification levels mean, see <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/borough-overview/>

<sup>15</sup> PTAL is a measure of connectivity of an area by public transport. PTAL values range from 0-6, with 6 representing the best connectivity. Data for London can be found here: <https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/urban-planning-and-construction/planning-with-webcat/webcat>

## The difficulties in getting well-paid, secure work

While unemployment has fallen, and while average incomes in Lewisham are higher than the UK average, high levels of inequality and high housing costs lead to high levels of poverty.

*'Alright, they say you can get round it. You can do cheap meals, yeah I do now that. But it's just that little bit of extra money, little bit of pocket money that you can go and buy a pair of shoes [with] or something like that. That's all it is, really, just having that extra bit of money. And that's what the government don't understand.'*

Woman, part-time employed

Median weekly earnings in the borough in 2016 were £620.80 for full time workers compared to £632.4 in London and £541.80 for England and Wales.<sup>16</sup> Men in Lewisham earn £641.4 a week, which is below the London average for men but above the England average, whilst women at £586.8 a week are above both the London and England averages for women.<sup>17</sup> The median household income across the borough is £29,848, 15% lower than the London average. There is also significant income equality in Lewisham, reflected in Figure 1 above. In four wards (Evelyn, Bellingham, Downham and New Cross) the median income is below £25,000.

Unemployment in Lewisham has fallen steadily for the last six years and now stands at 5.7% of the working age population. This is in line with the London average (5.7%) but higher than the national average (4.7%). Lewisham has higher levels of people on out of work benefits than the rest of London (9.1% compared to 7.2%). The numbers of adults claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) has fallen in recent years, though at 1.7% it is higher than the London average of 1.2%. While the number of JSA claimants has declined, the numbers for Employment Support Allowance and Incapacity benefits claimants have largely staid the same, with 5.7% of the population on these benefits compared to 4.8% across London. The number of lone parents claiming out of work benefits is also higher; 1.5% compared to 1.0% in London.<sup>18</sup> The government's welfare freeze will have a significant impact on these groups.

There are significant differences in the employment rates among different groups of residents. Unemployment is far higher among men in Lewisham at 6.5% than among women at 4.1%. This is above the London average for men, whereas for women it is significantly below.<sup>19</sup> Across the UK the unemployment rate for people from a BAME background is 8.2% compared to 4.3% for people who self-identify as white ethnic. For Lewisham the numbers are 8.1% for BAME residents and 4.1% for white ethnic.<sup>20</sup> There is also a significant disability employment gap nationally, with just 48.3% of disabled people aged 16-64 in employment in the last quarter of 2016 compared to 80.5% of non-disabled people<sup>21</sup> and 9% of economically active disabled people are unemployed across the UK.<sup>22</sup> In Lewisham, 22.4% of people who are economically inactive are long-term sick, compared to just 16.7% across London.<sup>23</sup> Some people will be part of more

*'It is extra hard for some – if you have a disability, if you aren't white, if you are queer – poverty isn't just about resources, it's racism, homophobia'* Crofton Park Local Assembly

<sup>16</sup> NOMIS, official labour market statistics by Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Profile Lewisham, 2016 at <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157254/report.aspx?town=lewisham>

<sup>17</sup> <http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s48217/06CESAnnualReview2016Safer080317.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> NOMIS, see footnote 13

<sup>19</sup> NOMIS, see footnote 13

<sup>20</sup> Annual Population Survey, April 2016 – March 2017

<sup>21</sup> House of Commons briefing paper nr 7540, Key statistics on people with disabilities in employment, Dec 2016

<sup>22</sup> Office for National Statistics, A08: Labour market status of disabled people, 16 August 2017

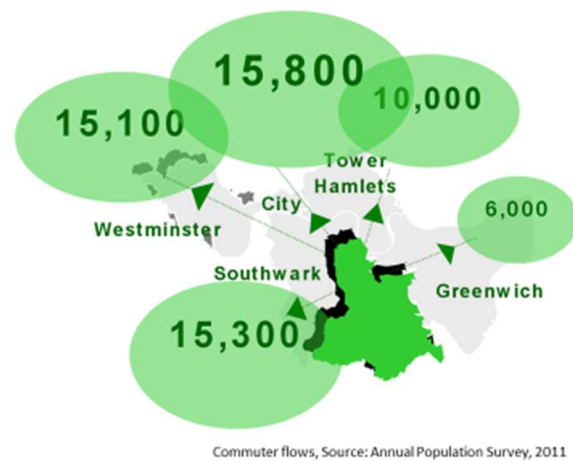
<sup>23</sup> NOMIS, see footnote 13

than one group that is disadvantaged in the labour market and this can compound any difficulties they face in getting well-paid, secure work.

While Lewisham has seen significant falls in unemployment in recent years, it has also seen a significant rise of in-work poverty. In 2015, it was estimated that 27% of Lewisham’s residents were earning less than the London Living Wage (£9.75 per hour since April 2017). This is higher than at any time since 2008, suggesting that wages are not keeping pace with rising living costs.

Lewisham has a very small economy, with a predominance of small and micro businesses and very few larger businesses. Lewisham’s public sector institutions are the major employers in the borough. It is well connected by transport links into Westminster, the City of London, Canary Wharf and Southwark and over 60% of Lewisham residents work outside the borough. Job density – the number of jobs per working age adult – is 0.40 in Lewisham, lower than all other London Borough.<sup>24</sup>

Lewisham was the joint first local authority in the country to become an accredited Living Wage employer.<sup>25</sup> Lewisham has also introduced a business rate discount to incentivise other local employers to become accredited Living Wage employers. The number of Living Wage employers in Lewisham has risen from 5 in 2015 to 33 in August 2017.<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 4.** Commuter flows from Annual Population Survey, 2011.

The opportunities available in the wider London economy are vital for Lewisham’s residents, but there is a growing concentration of jobs both at the very high end of the skills spectrum and at the extreme lower end. This makes it difficult for people with low level qualifications to progress into well-paid jobs. While the London employment market is easy for residents to access, 6.3% of Lewisham’s working age residents having no qualifications and 35.9% have qualifications at Levels 1, 2 or 3.<sup>27</sup>

Well-paid, secure jobs are the main route out of poverty. This has therefore become an area of focus for the Commission.

### Children living in poverty

Lewisham is in the top 20 of local authorities in the country with highest levels of child poverty.<sup>28</sup> Child poverty has a direct impact on the life chances of young people, limiting their chances of succeeding at school and going on to find secure employment. Child poverty is also associated with a wide range of health-damaging impacts, including adverse long-term social and psychological effects. The poor health associated with child poverty limits children’s potential and development, leading to reduced life chances in adulthood.<sup>29</sup>

Education and training are vital routes out of poverty. Lewisham has excellent primary schools, but it has the worst GCSE results in London and high numbers of young people with no qualifications. In Lewisham only 45.9% of pupils eligible for free school meals achieve 5 GCSEs at A\*-C, compared to

<sup>24</sup> Job density is a measure of the number of jobs in an area divided by the resident population aged 16-64. For example, a job density of 1.0 would mean that there is one job for every resident aged 16-64.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/news/first-london-living-wage-boroughs-announced>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.lewisham.gov.uk/news/Pages/Living-Wage-employers-rise-by-560-per-cent.aspx>

<sup>27</sup> <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/qualifications-working-age-population-nvq-borough>.

<sup>28</sup> After housing costs have been taken into account.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, <http://adc.bmj.com/content/early/2016/02/08/archdischild-2014-306746>.

56.2% of all pupils. The pupil cohort that performed the least well (by March 2017) were black, white, and disadvantaged pupils.<sup>30</sup> The need to improve standards and raise educational outcomes, especially in secondary schools, was at the heart of the recommendations made by Lewisham's recent Education Commission.<sup>31</sup>

In 2015, it was estimated that 18.5% of children aged 0-15 in Lewisham lived in households in which a parent or guardian was claiming out-of-work benefits, the seventh highest of all 32 London boroughs. At the same time, being in work is no guarantee of escaping poverty. In 2015, the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that nearly two thirds of children in poverty lived in working households.<sup>32</sup> Low incomes, changes to the benefit system and the rise of insecure part-time work can put immense pressure on working parents with dependent children, especially in larger households.

*'Financially, we get help with our rent, we get help with DLA [Disability Living Allowance]. But although we are probably getting a little bit more money than everyone else because of DLA, it's still a struggle on a day-to-day basis because, you know, all the kids go to different establishments. This week, for instance, it's Red Nose Day, so one has got own clothes day on Friday, they're needing a pound for that, the other one has got a play next week and they're needing a new t-shirt and new tracksuit bottoms for that, the other one has got a trip so they need a packed lunch, you know. There's always something.'*

Mother of son with autism

Children in lone parent households are more likely to grow up in poverty as lone parents often struggle to balance work and childcare and are therefore more likely to be on low incomes. According to the last Census, 11% of households in the borough are lone parent households, compared to an average of 8.5% in inner London. The overwhelming majority (91.5%) of lone parent households in Lewisham are headed by women.

### The price of unaffordable housing

The cost of housing is an important factor in London and Lewisham's higher poverty rate. London and Lewisham have a higher than national average income but the cost of housing is such that 27% of Londoners and 31% of inner London residents (including Lewisham) live in poverty after housing costs are taken into account, compared with 21% nationally.<sup>33</sup>

House prices in Lewisham are currently lower than the London average, but the median house price is still 14 times greater than the median income in the borough. Private rents in Lewisham are below the inner London average but are rising faster than elsewhere in London, increasing by 40% between 2011 and 2016. This means many tenants pay more than half their income in rent. The median market rent in the borough also exceeds the maximum Local Housing Allowance (LHA) that can be claimed, and LHA rates have been frozen till 2020.

<sup>30</sup> <http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s48217/06CESAnnualReview2016Safer080317.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> The Commission's final report is available at <http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s44260/Lewisham%20Education%20Commission%20Report.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/7880>.

<sup>33</sup> [https://data.london.gov.uk/apps\\_and\\_analysis/poverty-in-london-201516-2/](https://data.london.gov.uk/apps_and_analysis/poverty-in-london-201516-2/)

Affordability is an issue across all types of tenure.



***The Median Market Rent in the borough significantly exceeds the maximum Housing Benefit that can be claimed.***

Source: Valuation Office Agency, Inner London Housing allowance

### The Commission's focus

The Commission also heard from people in Lewisham about what made it difficult to make ends meet in addition to a range of evidence on Lewisham's population, London's economy, the housing market, child poverty in the borough, and links between poverty and health outcomes<sup>34</sup>. From this evidence, four key areas of focus were chosen:

- *Supporting residents to access well-paid, secure jobs inside and outside of Lewisham;*
- *Tackling child poverty by supporting parents into decent work;*
- *Improving the local housing market; and*
- *Strengthening support within communities.*

<sup>34</sup> A full methodology can be found as Appendix 1.

### 3. Supporting residents to access well-paid, secure jobs inside and outside of Lewisham

*'The kind of clients that we see, even where they are employed, they tend to be on low incomes, on zero-hours contracts, so the money that is coming in is not enough... but it's also not stable, it's not money that they can rely on... So yes, these cases are real in Lewisham... People don't have job security, they don't have well-paid jobs and, in most cases, they really are, you know, on the edge.'*

Citizens Advice Bureau caseworker, Lewisham Advice Bureau

#### Works, skills and the role of anchor institutions

While Lewisham has a low jobs density, London has a thriving economy with an immense range of employment opportunities. The challenge for the Council and other local public sector partners is to equip residents with the necessary skills to ensure that they can benefit from the projected growth of London's economy by finding secure, well-paid jobs, with opportunities for personal fulfilment and progression. This is particularly important as Universal Credit will extend conditionality within the benefits system to claimants who are already in work and earning below a certain threshold.

*'There are no big businesses in Lewisham, or trades young people can be apprenticed to'*  
Grove Park Assembly

Jobcentre Plus administers benefits and provides advice on finding employment, with the Work Programme supporting those who have been long-term unemployed. This has been relatively effective in supporting those on JSA into work, but it was far less successful with those on incapacity benefits. In this context, Lewisham has been working with Lambeth and Southwark to deliver the Pathways to Employment programme, a council-led employment-support service which has helped people with complex employment support needs into work. In its first phase, the programme helped 25% of participants into work<sup>35</sup>, compared to 3.9% for ex Incapacity Benefit ESA claimants after a year on the Work Programme<sup>36</sup>. In total the programme has now supported 380 residents into work.

The Work Programme is soon to be replaced by the Work and Health Programme. In Central London, the programme will be known as Central London Works. This will be more devolved, and support will be more focused on those who face greater challenges, including health and mental health conditions. However, the budget for the programme will be far smaller, with £554m over the lifetime of the Work and Health Programme, compared to an estimated £1.5bn spent on disability employment through the Work Programme and Work Choice.<sup>37</sup> It therefore risks being unable to meet the levels of demand and provide support for those in Lewisham who may need it.

While Lewisham has a highly qualified population, residents who don't have high levels of qualification face poorer employment outcomes and often lack support into training. The number of adults aged 19 and over starting a further education or skills course in Lewisham declined by 27.5% between 2012/13

<sup>35</sup><http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s58339/Report%20Pathways%20to%20employment%20phase%202%20-%20contract%20award.pdf>

<sup>36</sup><https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmworpen/363/363.pdf>

<sup>37</sup><https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/news-parliament-2015/future-of-jobcentre-plus-report-published-16-17/>



and 2015/16.<sup>38</sup> This was broadly in line with the decline seen nationally (28.0%) and it followed a 35% reduction in spending on adult skills in the last parliament<sup>39</sup>.

The number of apprenticeship starts among Lewisham residents jumped from 530 in 2007/8 to 2170 in 2011/12.<sup>40</sup> Nine in ten apprenticeship starts in Lewisham are at level 2 or level 3, with nearly half (43.6%) being among those aged 25 and over. It has remained relatively stable since then. From April, the government's apprenticeship levy came into effect, under which large employers have to pay 0.5% of their payroll into a digital account, with the funds only being redeemable against apprenticeship training fees. Given Lewisham's employment profile, only large public sector employers will pay the levy, and much of the levy funds may go unspent. The levy may stimulate investment in training by large employers across the rest of London but there are concerns it may lead to lower apprenticeship recruitment among smaller non-levy paying employers as some aren't willing to pay the 10% co-investment contribution.<sup>41</sup> This could have a particular impact in Lewisham, given the predominance of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the local economy.

The reductions in funding for further education and for adult education provided by local authorities combined with the reduced footprint for employment support under the Central London Works programme, will make it difficult for many adults – both those unemployed and those in work on low pay – to access the training and support they may need. It also raises questions over how people who will be subject to in-work conditionality in the future under Universal Credit, will be able to access the training they may need to improve their income.

While there are immense opportunities in the London economy, the low jobs density in Lewisham means there are fewer high quality local employment opportunities for residents than in other boroughs. As well as supporting residents to access opportunities in the Lewisham and London economy, Lewisham Council should also seek to promote business growth and high-quality jobs locally. In addition, if existing proposals for the extension of the Bakerloo line through Lewisham and Catford to Bromley Town Centre as well as Hayes are implemented, residents living in the south of the borough would gain significantly better access to job opportunities across London.

*'We need to do more to reach the working strugglers'*  
Blackheath Assembly

Beyond this, there is an important role for 'anchor institutions' - bodies such as local authorities, hospitals, universities, housing associations and large private sector organisations - in tackling poverty and promoting inclusive growth.<sup>42</sup> As Lewisham has no large private employers, all of these institutions are public.

Through the money they spend procuring goods and services, the number of local people they employ, and their ownership of public assets, these institutions make significant contributions to the local economy. The table below provides staff numbers for some of the bigger public organisations in the borough allowing for a rough indication of their impact as local employers<sup>43</sup>:

<sup>38</sup> DfE and Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Further Education (FE) Data Library, 2017

<sup>39</sup> Associations of Colleges submission for July 2015 budget at <https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/AoC%20submission%20to%20the%20Budget%205%20June%202015.pdf#page=28>

<sup>40</sup> DfE and ESFA, FE Data Library, 2017

<sup>41</sup> Association of Employment and Learning Providers and Warwick Institute for Employment Research, The impacts of the apprenticeship levy, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example <https://www.irf.org.uk/report/we-can-solve-poverty-uk> and [https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/rsa\\_inclusive-growth-commission-final-report-march-2017.pdf](https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/rsa_inclusive-growth-commission-final-report-march-2017.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> The information has been taken from respective organisations' statement of accounts, annual accounts or annual employment profiles. This information can't be easily compared, as a number of these organisations work across borough boundaries and their financial years end on different dates. It also doesn't contain information about the organisations' overall spend either as direct provider of services or through procurement.

Anchor institutions	Full-time equivalent staff (2016)
Lewisham Council	2,038
Goldsmiths	1,156
Lewisham Southwark College	398
Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust	6,065
Lewisham Homes	468
Phoenix Community Housing	158

These anchor institutions can have a significant impact on the local workforce and employee conditions by the training they provide their staff, the working conditions they offer such as opportunities for flexible working, and general support they provide their staff, particularly those with health conditions. The amount spent on procurement by such bodies can be used to negotiate social value in contracts, such as training opportunities and pay conditions. Finally, there are also wider benefits such as working with the borough's large and diverse voluntary sector and existing programmes such as Lewisham Local.<sup>44</sup>

## Recommendations

### *Anchor institutions*

- **The Council and its public sector partners**, as the borough's main employers and biggest spenders in terms of procurement, should cooperate closely to support local economic growth. This group of anchor institutions should work to establish a 'Lewisham Deal' which outlines joint commitments to improve opportunities for residents and support inclusive local economic growth. The Lewisham Deal could include:
  - A coordinated approach to apprenticeships to promote opportunities for residents, including maximising the local spend of the apprenticeship levy for upskilling and in-work progression, building on the strength of the Council's existing apprenticeship programme.
  - A shared commitment to London Living Wage accreditation and promotion, flexible working and opportunities for job progression for employees.
  - A shared commitment to support good mental health in work by committing to the 'Time to Change' Employer Pledge<sup>45</sup>, by developing an action plan that normalises conversations about mental health in the workplace and ensures that employees who are facing these problems feel supported.
  - A shared commitment to generating social value through procurement, for example by negotiating for the provision of apprenticeships and job opportunities for local residents.
  - A commitment to investigate whether the organisation's procurement processes could create opportunities for local, often smaller, businesses to provide goods and services, to enable more money to stay in the borough.
  - A shared strategic approach to the skills and local economic development agenda, including training, employment opportunities and business engagement. This could enable the skills shortages in the NHS and wider public sector to be met through higher level apprenticeships, pre-employment support, training while in employment and routes through to Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE).
  - A coordinated approach to encourage staff to contribute to local communities by linking staff and service users with local volunteering opportunities.
  - A joint commitment to supporting the community and voluntary sector by building on existing work by Goldsmiths, Voluntary Action Lewisham and the Lewisham Local collaboration.

<sup>44</sup> For more information about Lewisham Local, see <https://www.lewishamlocal.org.uk/>

<sup>45</sup> Time to Change is a campaign run by Mind and Rethink Mental Illness to improve how people think and act about mental health: [www.time-to-change.org.uk](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk)



- A commitment to engage with local schools and FE colleges to raise aspirations of their students and provide information and advice about apprenticeships and further/higher education or work experience opportunities.

#### *Improving the work and skills landscape locally*

- **The Council** should work with Lambeth, Southwark and Jobcentre Plus to build on the success of its joint Pathways to Employment programme to develop a pilot that supports career progression for residents who are in work, but in poverty.
- **The Council's adult education service** should work with partners, including **housing providers**, to support those furthest away from the job market to develop soft skills by providing access to pre-employment training.
- **The Council and its partners** should continue to prioritise the improvement of Lewisham's secondary schools to offer young people the best start in life, building on the work of the Lewisham Education Commission.
- **The Council and its partners** should explore ways to raise aspirations and provide good quality careers advice in schools by linking industry, public sector institutions, professional trade bodies and HE and FE providers with local schools. The Council and partners should start a pilot where their staff, via their staff volunteering programmes, are encouraged to volunteer in support schools and FE colleges with careers advice and mentoring programmes. This can be expanded to include people working elsewhere in Lewisham and London.
- **The Council's Pension Investment Committee** should use its influence as an investor of roughly £1bn to open discussions about pay, working conditions and job opportunities for London residents with the businesses it invests in across London.
- **The Council** should use its procurement processes to ensure that all components of the Social Value Act (2012) are geared towards the needs of the most deprived members of the borough. The Council should include statements on the social value offer in the reports it uses in the Council's formal decision-making processes including for its Mayor and Cabinet meetings, for decisions to go to tender or to award a contract.
- **The Council** should encourage business growth in the borough, particularly in growth sectors of the London economy. This should build on the success of the existing Council created Dek co-working business spaces<sup>46</sup> and investigate the potential to introduce a local currency – the Lewisham Pound – to support local businesses.
- **The Council** should continue to champion the Living Wage in Lewisham. It should continue to provide an incentive in the form of a business rates discount to employers that become accredited London Living Wage employers.
- Regeneration should deliver not just the homes that Lewisham needs, but high quality jobs too. **New residential developments** should look to provide space for businesses, particularly new and small businesses, so employment in the borough can be stimulated.

#### *Regional and national changes to work and skills*

- **The Council** should work with **Central London Forward and other London partners** to ensure that the devolved Central London Works Programme offers the support local people need to overcome barriers to employment and access high quality jobs. Where possible, the Central London Works Programme should link to existing infrastructure, communities and local partner organisations, building on the success of the Pathways to Employment programme.
- **Transport for London** should extend the Bakerloo line from Elephant and Castle beyond Lewisham to Hayes as a minimum but also to Bromley Town Centre to improve access to job opportunities across London for residents living in the areas of concentrated deprivation in the south of the borough.

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<sup>46</sup> <https://www.lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/business/business-spaces/Pages/About-the-enterprise-hubs.aspx>

- **The Council** should lobby **central government** to ensure that London boroughs can use unspent apprenticeship levy to invest in business support and the wider skills development of their residents alongside their employees.
- **Central government** should pause the roll out of Universal Credit and review its design and implementation, particularly the 6-week wait for an initial payment which is causing many recipients to fall into debt<sup>47</sup>. The **Council** should also lobby **central government** for an end to the welfare freeze which are impacting on those who are out of work and those who are in work on low incomes, pushing both further into poverty, and for a reversal of the cuts to Universal Credit.

'Do something to stop the delay in benefits' Catford South Local Assembly

#### 4. Tackling child poverty by supporting parents into decent work

*'We young single parents aren't getting the help that we're supposed to. There is work out there, but the work that you want to do, who's going to look after the children or pick them up for you?... Once we can get help, there is cleaning jobs out there, there is evening jobs out there. If I could get somebody, I would go. It's not as though I don't want to work. I'm happy to work because I'm having it hard.'*

A single mother and Phoenix resident.

##### Child poverty, child care and lone parent unemployment

Parents in Lewisham face two major and inter-related challenges to being able to increase their incomes. One is finding suitable employment; another is finding affordable and suitable childcare.

Part-time and/or flexible employment opportunities are vital in enabling lone parents, and parents in general, to juggle childcare with work. Only 27.7% of lone parents in Lewisham are in full-time employment and another 27.8% in part-time employment, leaving 44.6% not in employment. There is evidence that single parents want access to flexible work, but are not always able to find it.<sup>48</sup> Research suggests that nations with higher maternal employment rates – more mothers in work – are more likely to have employers that offer flexible work options, including the ability to set some of your own hours or to use accumulated hours to earn leave.<sup>49</sup>

The other major challenge facing all parents is suitable and affordable childcare. Access to flexible, affordable childcare can reduce pressures on family income and help parents to participate in work, education or training. According to research, four in ten mothers identify childcare costs as the single biggest obstacle to work (42 per cent of those in work and 41 per cent of those not working).<sup>50</sup> Childcare has to be affordable, sufficiently flexible and available at the right time to enable parents to combine work and family life.

Lewisham has a broad mix of childcare provision and a good reputation for the high standard of its early years provision. There are good working relationships between the Council and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) providers across the sector that have been established over a long period and a strong shared commitment to delivering high quality provision.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-citizens-advice-works/media/press-releases/citizens-advice-responds-to-news-universal-credit-roll-out-will-not-be-paused/>

<sup>48</sup> [http://www.gingerbread.org.uk/file\\_download.aspx?id=7866](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk/file_download.aspx?id=7866).

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/press-releases/two-in-three-mothers-say-high-cost-of-childcare-is-a-barrier-to-working-more/>.

<sup>50</sup> See the Resolution Foundation report cited above.

The challenges for Lewisham are to promote high quality, well-paid, flexible job opportunities, and ensure the provision of flexible and high quality child care by promoting innovative models of childcare. The Council also needs to ensure that parents have access to high quality, up to-date advice about childcare provision in the borough. Parents may also need support understanding their childcare entitlements, especially the new 30 hours entitlement for three- and four-year olds which has recently been introduced as well as the existing entitlement for some two-year-olds of 570 hours of free early education or childcare per year. Finally, information about and access to benefits is crucial for parents who are not in work and for those parents who work but are on low incomes.

## Recommendations

### *Opportunities for flexible working and skills development*

- **The Council** should set an example by improving its offer of flexible working opportunities. The Council should become an accredited Timewise employer<sup>51</sup> and work with the Timewise foundation to develop an improvement plan that ensures it offers good quality flexible working opportunities to its employees. The Council should encourage its partners to do the same.
- **The Council** should work with its public sector partners to promote flexible working across the borough to support parental and lone-parent employment, including by engaging with local businesses.
- **The Council** should work with employment and skills partners to support lone parents to develop skills the skills that will enable them to take jobs that offer flexible working opportunities.
- **The Council's adult education service and the local FE college** should work together to help parents with childcaring responsibilities to access opportunities that allow them to upskill and support their career progression. This could be done by creating flexible and/or family friendly learning opportunities that lead from the Adult Learning Lewisham through to more formal learning in a college setting.

'Access to relevant learning opportunities' Evelyn/New Cross Local Assembly

### *Access to information and advice*

- **The Council's** Family Information Service (FIS) directory should be improved so that it provides easy-to-use to contain up-to-date information on childcare provision in the borough. The directory should include information on the provision of childcare, including out-of-hours provision, holiday provision, schools' breakfast clubs and after-school clubs. It should include information on eligibility criteria for that care, including advice on childcare entitlements, eligibility criteria for financial support for childcare and information on which providers accept childcare vouchers. The FIS should allow parents to enter their postcode, select the type of providers they are interested in and the geographical area they would like to search, and then be provided with a list of available care providers. The Council should make sure the FIS keeps up-to-date records of extended schools services in the borough.
- **The Council** should launch a targeted information campaign to promote the 30 hours entitlement to child care being introduced in September 2017 to maximise take-up, as well as provide information on the existing entitlement for some 2 year olds. The Council should work with its Councillors and partners such as **Children's Centres, private providers, schools, Jobcentre Plus and GP surgeries** to get the message out to parents, including those who do not have access to the internet, and those with literacy issues. Information about childcare should be routinely offered to parents who access other council services such as the housing options centre or employment support services.

<sup>51</sup> <http://timewise.co.uk/what-we-do/accreditation/>

- **The Council, children centres, schools, private, voluntary and independent nurseries** but also organisations such as food banks should work with **Advice Lewisham**, the network of the main free advice providers in Lewisham<sup>52</sup>, so parents are helped to access free, expert advice about benefits and their entitlements.

#### Childcare provision

- **The Council** should work with **Children’s Centres**, providers and parent groups to explore ways to encourage parents and extended family to participate in the provision of childcare, including by exploring options for co-operative childcare clubs, community-led and community-owned nurseries. Parents, extended family and other members of the community participating in these forms of co-produced child care can then also be supported into related careers.
- School buildings should be used for the provision of breakfast and after-schools clubs, either by **schools** providing these services directly or by schools making their buildings available for childcare provision by other providers. Parents should be encouraged to participate in the breakfast and after-schools clubs at their children’s schools, which could be run as social enterprises.
- **The Council and the Early Years Partnership Board** should work closely with private, voluntary and independent nurseries, schools and childminders to increase out-of-hours provision of childcare, including encouraging flexible childminders that can provide care at short notice.

## 5. Improving the local housing market

*‘We have to stay where we are because the rent that we get charged is the rent that we got charged when we first moved in because the landlord is so bad, he just leaves things... But we physically can’t afford to move anywhere else because if we do, and if they accept housing benefit, they are wanting a massive deposit. Where are we going to find that?’*

Mother and full time carer

### Housing in Lewisham

Lewisham has relatively affordable housing compared to the London average, but the average house price is still 14 times the median salary in the Borough. Affordability is an issue across all types of tenure. The focus of the council has been to increase the number of housing units to help tackle Lewisham and London’s housing crisis and the Council has exceeded its London Plan targets year on year. The Council is delivering on its commitment to secure 2,000 new affordable homes in the borough by 2018, of which at least 500 will be new Council homes, but even more affordable homes are needed.

A growing number of households in Lewisham – including those on low incomes – are in the private rented sector (PRS). The number of Lewisham residents in PRS has doubled in the last decade. Private rents in Lewisham are below the inner London average but are rising faster than elsewhere in London, increasing by 40% between 2011 and 2016. This means many tenants pay more than half their income in rent. In addition, Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) offer little security and fixed periods of as little of 6 months. Many Lewisham residents live in poor quality rental properties and may be reluctant to report problems for fear of revenge evictions.

In June 2017, there were just over 1,900 Lewisham households in temporary accommodation, less than 500 of which were in temporary accommodation. The Council has been working to increase the quality of temporary accommodation its offers by increasing the units available in the borough. This is being done by acquiring properties on the open market, converting existing properties such as a former care

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.advicelewisham.org.uk/>

home and a long term empty office block, and by developing PLACE/Ladywell<sup>53</sup>. PLACE/Ladywell offers 24 modular apartments almost entirely constructed off site, and as a result built quicker and cheaper than standard construction methods. The structure sits on currently vacant Council land while longer-term regeneration plans are being developed, and can be moved to another vacant site in the borough after several years<sup>54</sup>.

Homelessness in Lewisham is largely driven by evictions from the private rented sector. The Council uses Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to help those affected by the benefit cap and works closely with the Lewisham Credit Union to provide bridging loans to households to prevent homelessness. In future the Council want to increase the number of households accessing housing support before reaching crisis point, and has developed a landlord licensing scheme for homes in multiple occupation above commercial premises to drive up quality in the private rented sector. Early support by housing providers for people with mental health problems, where there can often be links to housing issues including worries over rent arrears and (anticipated) threats of eviction, is important as well.

However, major challenges in the housing market remain for Lewisham. Supply is a key concern as it is across London and for most parts of the UK, with housebuilding in the capital only now picking up after decades at an all-time low. The other main concern is the ability of the Council to have a positive impact on the affordability and quality of homes in the Private Rented Sector. The challenge remains for the Council to secure better outcomes for residents in the private rented sector, and prevent homelessness.

## Recommendations

### *Building the homes Lewisham needs*

- **The Council** should build as much social housing as possible, and continue to press national government to lift restrictions on local authorities' abilities to use their capital funding, to allow local authorities to retain Right to Buy receipts in order to invest in new social housing, and to lift the borrowing cap on the Housing Revenue Account.
- **The Council** should prioritise the building of units with more secure tenancies at rents that are affordable in relation to people's wages as opposed to units at market rent. The Council should also continue to negotiate to increase the numbers of social and affordable housing units and other benefits from developers.
- **The Council's** land should be used more ambitiously to build mixed developments at greater density and scale, recognising that most often more market-rate properties need to be developed to deliver affordable units. Joint ventures, land-sharing arrangements, community land trusts, partnerships with housing associations and new forms of ownership should all be explored. Exploring the broad range of options above will best enable the council to balance the needs of those that require new housing, particularly those on the Council's housing waiting list, with the needs of current residents. Plans should be developed in consultation with local communities.
- **The Council** should promote new types of housing, especially step-down units for older residents to ensure people that want to move to smaller properties are able to.

'Build more social housing and retain ownership of it, lobby central government for a rent cap and ban leasehold on new builds'  
Online Consultation

### *Influencing the Private Rented Sector*

<sup>53</sup><http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s47627/04%20Temporary%20accommodation%20pressures%20250117.pdf>

<sup>54</sup><https://www.lewisham.gov.uk/inmyarea/regeneration/lewishamtowncentre/Pages/placeladywell.aspx>

- A social lettings agency should be operating in the borough that works with mainstream landlords to offer more secure tenancies at the lower end of the market. This agency can provide a convenient way for tenants to provide feedback about the quality of rental properties in the borough. **The Council** could look to expand the work of its existing lettings agency or encourage an existing social or ethical lettings agency to operate in the borough.
- **The Council** should demand that lettings agents operating in the borough provide tenants with an information pack at the start of tenancies about their rights as tenants and how tenants can access Council services to help enforce those rights.
- A local tenants' union should be established in the borough to offer advice services, help tenants enforce their rights and organise campaigns. **Lewisham Citizens, Goldsmiths' students union and existing tenant and residents associations** could be asked to develop the union.
- **The Council** should consider investing in the enforcement of quality standards in the PRS to create wider changes to the behaviour of bad landlords as they perceive the risk of enforcement against them to increase. Newly introduced powers that allow local authorities to use civil penalties against landlords in breach of certain conditions could be used to fund this increased service.
- **The Council** should look into expanding the current landlord licensing scheme, and make the case to government for this.

*'Provide more advice on what people should do with rent arrears'* Crofton Park Assembly

#### *Preventing homelessness*

- **The Council** should work to identify those at risk of homelessness at an early stage by greater use of local data and using lessons from behavioural economics to engage with residents to prevent homelessness.
- **The Council** should create a single point of contact for private landlords to discuss the implications of universal credit and to help safeguard tenants during their transition to universal credit, and proactively reach out to landlords via letting agents operating in the borough.
- **The Council** should extend its programme of developing units such as PLACE/Ladywell and acquiring properties to increase the quality of temporary accommodation it offers.
- **National government** should lift the cap on Local Housing Allowance rates which is driving up homelessness and instead tie it to median market rents.
- **The Council** should also join calls for a pause to the rollout of Universal Credit, pending a review of the system. It should call for an end to the 6-week wait for an initial payment is pushing people into rent arrears<sup>55</sup>.

#### *Regional and national policies for the Private Rented Sector*

- **Government** should consider introducing an insurance product for tenants to replace deposits. This insurance product would cover legitimate costs for the landlord up to a maximum amount in a similar way to how deposits are currently used. This would replace the need for tenants to pay expensive deposits at the start of tenancies.
- **The Council** should lobby for the Mayor of London and local authorities to have greater powers over regulation of the private rented sector. This could include powers to review developers' viability assessments; to implement rent controls; to mandate quality standards in the PRS; to make it more difficult for people to be evicted from private rental properties; and to monitor and prevent discrimination in the PRS.

<sup>55</sup> Evidence submitted to the Work and Pensions Committee's Universal Credit Rollout inquiry, Sept 2017 at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/work-and-pensions-committee/universal-credit-rollout/written/70154.pdf>

## 6. Strengthening support within communities

*'We are quite lucky [on this] estate... when we get together, it's a melting pot of amazingness. You know, everybody... if you're not good at one thing, there's always someone that is. If you need support, there's always someone that can help. If you are struggling with a situation or a bit of paperwork, there's always someone that can [do it]. That, for me, is magic and it's got me through...'*

Mother of son with autism

### Increasing community resilience

Strong social networks can play an important role in helping to protect people against poverty and deprivation and to mitigate against its effects.<sup>56</sup> Where people can tap into both formal and informal networks, they are more likely to be able to access goods and services such information, advice and support. They are also better able to opportunities to develop their skills, find work and to feel connected to and invested in a place. A key element of strong social networks or resilient communities is their ability to adapt to at times unexpected, changing circumstances and successfully bounce back from adverse situations.<sup>57</sup>

From speaking to residents, the Commission knows how valuable support within communities can be for people facing difficulties. Lewisham has strong communities, and a long history of civic activism. At present, there are over 800 active voluntary groups and more than 200 individual faith groups, with a recent survey revealing that 35% of Lewisham residents had volunteered over the past 12 months.<sup>58</sup>

#### *Whitefoot & Downham Community Food + Project (wdcfplus) case study*

wdcfplus exists to combat deprivation, alleviate food poverty and build caring communities in its local area. Initially providing a food service for those experiencing hardship, the project now also works with other agencies to offer advice and support relating to health, nutrition, housing, employment, training and money management.

The project also encourages volunteering as a means for local residents to connect with others, prevent social isolation and build togetherness in the community. The project has mobilised over 50 volunteers from all sections of the community and several volunteers are former service users. wdcfplus has helped build confidence for some to enter employment and training, or it has been a lifeline for others where their benefits have been frozen or stopped.

One former visitor and volunteer said his time with wdcfplus was "the first time in several years that my skills were being used... The project gave me that confidence to get up and find a job".

Together, these individuals and organisations do a huge amount to support Lewisham residents in

<sup>56</sup> See *Social networks: their role in addressing poverty*, 2011 at

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/poverty-social-networks-full.pdf>.

<sup>57</sup> See RSA, *Connected Communities: How Social Networks Power and Sustain the Big Society* (2010: p. 47):

<https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/connected-communities-how-social-networks-power-and-sustain-the-big-society>, and CLES, *Understanding community resilience* (2013: p. 16) at <https://www.barrowcadbury.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/CLES-UNDERSTANDING-COMMUNITY-RESILIENCE-2013.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> See more at: <http://www.valewisham.org.uk/blog/state-sector-survey-takeaways>



managing the challenges of poverty, particularly in areas of childcare, employment and housing. The third sector plays a particularly important role in supporting people with often multiple, complex issues. The challenge for Lewisham is how such resilient communities can be grown and supported.

By their nature, resilient communities are to a significant extent self-reliant while also being well-connected to formal organisations across public, private and social spheres. However, despite the less formal structure of many social networks, they can still be supported by public and private bodies alike. Small bits of funding, from planning obligations or by crowdfunding, and the sharing of existing facilities, such as Lewisham’s library service including the community libraries and the existing local assemblies programme, can make big differences to informal and often small groups. Public bodies can also make efforts to become better connected to existing community groups to share information and opportunities. The growing practice of social prescribing where GPs and other care professionals can refer patients to a range of local (non-medical) services may be one such way. These referrals happen alongside treatment for medical issues and exists to support people with a wide range of social, emotional and practical needs.<sup>59</sup> This can include referrals to debt advice services or legal advice as well as volunteering and befriending as ways to tackle social isolation.

Existing, more formalised, community organisations have seen significant pressures in recent years which are constraining and changing the way they operate. A significant proportion of Lewisham’s charitable sector is financially vulnerable, as many organisations have had to use their reserves in the last year, and 22% not holding any reserves. While Lewisham Council continues to prioritise community activity, cuts to council budgets have impacted its grants programme, with a reduction of 15% in 2017 alone. To adapt to this new environment, 79% of Lewisham community organisations are delivering services in collaboration or partnership, with 76% of community organisations interested in co-location should the opportunity arise.

‘It needs to be easier for people to know how they can volunteer’ Blackheath assembly

Nevertheless, the tight operating context for community organisations means that many local charities and groups are focused on survival rather than extending their reach into the wider community or fundraising. With this in mind, a range of local partners have established Lewisham Local, a place-based sharing and giving initiative which is a catalyst, to increase local giving and champion local involvement to encourage civil society growth.

The challenge for Lewisham Council is to find ways to improve the resilience of local communities. The borough’s third sector need to make the most of different funding opportunities and increase collaboration by building on the good work already under way. Coordination of existing activities and sharing of information is particularly important in this regard. Beyond this, wider community participation needs to be supported and promoted to ensure that no individual is left behind.

## Recommendations

### Supporting community activity

- **Lewisham Local** should consider developing a ‘poverty disruption’ seed fund to fill the current gap in micro-grants to support local community activity. This could be funded by using relevant financial contributions from planning obligations.
- A ‘vulnerability audit’ should be conducted by the **Community Connections Service**<sup>60</sup>, that identifies where there are ‘invisible needs’ and where resilience is lowest across the borough to ensure services can become more targeted towards the borough’s most deprived residents.

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/social-prescribing>

<sup>60</sup> The Community Connections Service is delivered by Age UK Lewisham and Southwark and a consortium of voluntary sector partners to increase people’s wellbeing and link them to local services. More information can be found here: <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/lewishamandsouthwark/services/community-connections/>



- **Local Assemblies** should be encouraged to function as spaces in which the community sector can develop partnerships, share learning and share information on local activities.
- **Lewisham Council** should work with **Lewisham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)**, **Lewisham GPs** and **the borough's third sector** to enable GPs to take up Social Prescribing across the borough.

#### Increasing people's access to advice and support

- **Lewisham Council** should build on its work with Go On Lewisham<sup>61</sup> to support the most deprived parts of the community gain basic digital skills by supporting and prioritising community activity which helps develop people's digital skills, with due consideration of where these services are located.
- The activities by the **borough's community sector** should be actively promoted to residents and amongst community organisations by:
  - Developing a consolidated and live register of community activity
  - Promoting Voluntary Action Lewisham (VAL) contact information in Lewisham Life
  - Promoting local community activity more in the local press

#### The benefits of volunteering

- **The Council** should improve and promote its employee volunteering policy to encourage council staff to volunteer in the borough's most deprived communities by working with **Voluntary Action Lewisham** and using the evidence from the 'vulnerability audit' described above. The newly launched employee volunteering policy could then be used as an exemplar for **Lewisham Local partners** to promote to businesses inside and outside the borough, and encourage best practice.
- **Lewisham Local**, working with employers inside and outside the borough, should work towards supporting people who are not ready for work into volunteering opportunities which allow them to develop transferable skills and provide training on how to communicate or translate this in practice.

#### A stronger voluntary sector

- **The Council** should work with **VAL** and **Lewisham CCG** to support the borough's voluntary and community sector to access contract opportunities by organising 'meet the commissioner days' and committing to early notification when contracts go to tender.
- **The Council** should use its procurement processes to ensure that all components of the Social Value Act (2012), including community engagement, are geared towards the needs of the most deprived members of the borough. This could be achieved by:
  - Ensuring that all procurement processes are brought to the attention of the Social Value Officer in time to develop relationships with providers
  - Including statements on the social value offer of all new contracts and all decisions to go to tender in the reports used in the Council's formal decision-making processes including for its Mayor and Cabinet meetings.
  - Making community consultation and service user engagement a key component of social value

'Coordinate and publish a list of people willing to do DIY and repair jobs for other members of the community to save money when jobs need to be done' Catford South Assembly

<sup>61</sup> <https://local.go-on.co.uk/groups/34/>

## Assets

- **Lewisham Council** should continue to support the local voluntary and community sector to use their assets (such as community buildings) more efficiently and wherever possible, co-locate.
- **The Council** should work to ensure that there is a good provision of community resources in new residential developments by supporting developers to work with local community organisations.

**'Stop the loss of community assets  
by conversion to residential'**  
Crofton Park Assembly

## 7. Working together to tackle poverty: next steps and implementation

### An immediate response

This report will be presented to Lewisham Council's executive Mayor and Cabinet meeting in November 2017. The Commission expects Lewisham Council to adopt these recommendations and to begin implementing them as soon as possible.

### Change across the community

The Commission will also be asking other organisations in the borough to contribute, and we'll be writing to Lewisham and Southwark College, Lewisham Homes, Goldsmiths, Phoenix Community Housing and Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust to ask for their response. The Council should convene a meeting with these partners to discuss this report and the Commission looks forward to receiving their response to our recommendations. The Commission will also be writing to Voluntary Action Lewisham as the central membership organisation for charities, community groups and social enterprises in the borough, and asking VAL to distribute this report amongst their members.

### Advising national government

Furthermore, the Commission will be writing to:

- the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to set out our concerns over Universal Credit and the welfare freeze
- the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to highlight the impact of council cuts on deprived communities
- the Housing Minister to call for changes to the LHA, to greater freedoms to borrow to invest in social housing, and for greater powers to regulate the private rented sector.

### Staying the course

This report contains suggestions that can be implemented quickly, such as improvements to the Council's Family Information Service and signing up to Timewise, but some will take much longer time to implement, such as the building of more social housing.

The Commission therefore requests that a lead member at the Council remains responsible for overseeing Lewisham Council's actions to tackle poverty, to ensure that these long-term changes are enacted. The Commission encourages this Cabinet Member to present a yearly report to the Council's scrutiny and executive functions so progress can be tracked.

## Appendix 1: Listening to Lewisham's people and its organisations

### Our approach to consultation and engagement

In early commission meetings, we considered data on Lewisham's population, London's economy, the housing market, child poverty in the borough, and links between poverty and health outcomes. This helped establish the commission's focus and the four core themes. We considered where we could add value to the work already being done in Lewisham, reviewed examples of best practice, and explored new approaches. We have also looked at what we could learn from the work of other commissions on fairness or equality.

We have engaged with local residents, representatives from community organisations and faith groups, partner organisations and stakeholders by:

*Lived experience paper* – Early on, we organised visits to drop-in sessions at voluntary and community organisations where officers have spoken to a small number of residents about how they experience life in the borough and how they're getting by.

*Website and online survey* - The webpage contains information about the Commission's work including papers for its meetings. There is also a survey where anyone or any organisation can submit their views, experiences and suggestions for change. The Commission's work has also been promoted via the Council's social media accounts and its Lewisham Life email service.

*Press* - A number of articles about the Commission's work have appeared in local media.

*Local Assemblies* – Local assemblies are open meetings organised per electoral ward for anyone who lives, works or learns in the borough. All local assemblies were asked to discuss the work of the commission, so residents and Councillors could contribute their thoughts on causes of poverty and their ideas for local solutions.

*Visits* – Visits have been organised for the Commission to local services such as the Council's housing options centre, a provider of employment support and a Children's Centre to speak to residents and observe provision of services.

*Young Advisors* - Members of the Commission have attended a meeting of Lewisham's Young Advisors to discuss their thoughts on poverty and potential solutions.

*London Boroughs* – All London Boroughs have been approached to provide examples of work they are doing to combat poverty or its effects, and their experiences if they had hosted a similar Commission themselves.

*Poverty summit* – The Commission organised a summit to explore the issues of poverty and its effects on residents' lives on 12 July. More than 70 people, including local residents and representatives from community organisations and faith groups, came together to discuss the challenges facing those living in poverty in Lewisham. The summit was an opportunity for us to listen, learn and take away ideas from participants on what could be done to tackle the issues around poverty.

### Further data and evidence

This report has been deliberately kept brief. Papers with further evidence and data we considered can be found here: [www.lewisham.gov.uk/povertycommission](http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/povertycommission)

## Summary of comments received from residents

The following is a snapshot of the comments received from residents during local assembly meetings and from the online survey following some broad questions on poverty and living in Lewisham.

### What makes it difficult to make ends meet in Lewisham?

'The cost of public transport' Grove Park Local Assembly

'Jobs in Lewisham tend to be poorly paid' Blackheath Local

'Families being broken up and sent to other parts of the country leaves no support networks' Catford South Local Assembly

'The feeling of shame about being poor means isolated communities don't look for help' Grove Park Local Assembly

'Rogue landlords and extortionate rent and fees' Catford South Local Assembly

'A high percentage of work is outside of the borough which creates transport poverty' Blackheath Local Assembly

'Fear of crime, anti-social behaviour' Evelyn/New Cross Local Assembly

'Long term health conditions make it difficult for people to work and make ends meet' Crofton Park Local Assembly

'A lack of awareness about what help is available' Evelyn/New Cross Local Assembly

'There are no big businesses in Lewisham, or trades young people can be apprenticed to' Grove Park Local Assembly

'Low income, parking problems and unfair tickets being issued to vulnerable groups, poor housing and ineffective pressure on poor landlords to fulfil housing requirements from single older houses' Online Consultation

'It is extra hard for some – if you have a disability, if you aren't white, if you are queer – poverty isn't just about resources, it's racism, homophobia' Crofton Park Local Assembly

'Lone parents being treated as second class citizens' Evelyn/New Cross Local Assembly

'Access to relevant learning opportunities' Evelyn/New Cross Local Assembly

'The cost of school meals' Crofton Park Local Assembly

'We need more access to free food, and places to get healthy food' Online Consultation

What can you and your community do to help make it easier to get by?

'Free to use skill sharing events to help build resilience and a more joined up sense of community. The idea being to encourage different sides of the community to help each other e.g. city lawyers and marketing professionals offering tips to community services or initiatives' Online Consultation

'I support Lewisham Foodbank by donating food. They gave out 4850 3 days of emergency food last year. They need more publicity and support' Online Consultation

'Help people improve their diets' Crofton Park Local Assembly

'Where can I donate food?' Grove Park Local Assembly

'It needs to be easier for people to volunteer' Blackheath Local Assembly

'We need the CAB to be free to do more campaigning' Blackheath Local Assembly

'Coordinate and publish a list of people willing to do DIY and repair jobs for other members of the community to save money when jobs need to be done' Catford South Assembly

'Can the council help publicise the credit union?' Blackheath Local Assembly

'We need event venues for parties, dancing and drinking for young adults' Catford South Assembly

What can the Council and its partners do to help?

*HOUSING*

'We need real council housing – social rent' Grove Park Local Assembly

'Build more social housing and retain ownership of it, lobby central government for a rent cap and ban leasehold on new builds' Online Consultation

'Ensure that the housing associations that don't come up to scratch are held to account and do inspections and put pressure on them to fulfil their responsibilities, especially where tenants are being harassed' Online Consultation

'Please ensure builders contracted by housing associations are registered with the council and therefore bound by a code of conduct - and that they are not exploited or forced labour' Online Consultation

'Do more to address the challenges of rogue landlords' Catford South Local Assembly

'Support more community led housing by making land available' Crofton Park and Grove Park Local Assembly

## COMMUNITY

**'Stop the loss of community assets by conversion to residential'** Crofton Park Local Assembly

**'We need a council kite mark for approved services so people know where to go and who to trust'**  
Blackheath Local Assembly

**'Please ensure the contract for the Ladywell Tower goes to the presentation that offers the greatest community capital and not just private profit'** Online Consultation

## CHANGES TO SERVICE DELIVERY

**'Recognise that not everything can go online – sometimes you need to speak to a person'** Catford South Local Assembly

**'We need more action on and awareness of mental health issues'** Evelyn/New Cross Local Assembly

**'Provide more advice on what people should do with rent arrears'** Crofton Park Local

**'Help people get out of debt by making it clearer where to get advice'** Grove Park Local Assembly

**'Please ensure that where there are unclear parking restrictions resulting in penalties to people who live in those areas these are addressed as soon as possible. A specific councillor should be given the lead on investigating these issues and then asked to account about progress towards change'** Online Consultation

**'Make claiming and reclaiming benefits easier for those who have no access to the internet'** Crofton Park Local Assembly

**'We need more flexible care options and better transportation'**  
Evelyn Local Assembly

**'People need help using IT to access services'** Evelyn Local Assembly

## BENEFITS AND TAXES

**'A council tax relief fund would help ends meet'**  
Blackheath Local Assembly

**'Do something to stop the delay in benefits'** Catford South Local Assembly

**'We need to do more to reach the working strugglers'**  
Blackheath Local Assembly

**'Have a special council tax rate for pensioners living alone'**  
Catford South Local Assembly

## THE LOCAL ECONOMY

**'Attract more businesses through a positive policy plan for new business'**  
Blackheath Local Assembly

**'Create subsidies or a local investment fund for new local businesses - incentives for employing local people'**  
Online Consultation Respondent

**'Internationally, organisations such as LendwithCare use interest free loans provided by supporters such as me to lift people out of poverty. Could this model be adapted by councils for the UK?'**  
Online Consultation

**'Create more opportunities for adult work placements'**  
Catford South Local Assembly

**'We need a forum whereby residents are encouraged to meet with officials to talk about their concerns'** Catford South Local Assembly

**'Provide more cheap loans through the credit unions'**  
Crofton Park Local Assembly

**'People need to be empowered to look for a job'** Catford South Local Assembly

*N.B. This report contains a number of quotes from residents. All names have been anonymised.*