

Oldham  
Poverty  
Truth  
Commission  
Report

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# Overview of the journey

One of our Grassroots Commissioners introduces themselves by saying they've 'been a commissioner for five years'. That's because although the Commission only launched officially in 2021, there was a long journey preceding it.

From that point in the mists of time when they and a few others first heard about the Poverty Truth approach, looked at each other and thought "that's what we need to do, isn't it?", there have been some huge individual journeys and some major strategic/system ones. In this report, we hope to capture the stages of those journeys, from early recruitment and development through launch, relationship building, reaching conclusions and then realising them.

At one point we intended this to be a 'Manifesto for Change', making the case for doing things differently in Oldham. This no longer feels necessary, because the change is happening. Instead, we hope this report can stand as a record of how we want it to be different, of how getting there *can* be done differently, and a *reminder* of these principles whenever the journey gets hard.

## Who we are



**Front row:** Simon Carrigan, Aisling Bouketta, Kashif Ashraf, Ronni Hall, Lynda Smith, Mandy Ugbomah, Nadia Masood, Shanaz Siddique, Elaine Morgan, Lisa Williams

**Back row:** Marian Chidziya, Sayyida Bano, Jo Spurling, Robbie Cowbury, Caroline Lee, Diane Baxter, Richard Lynch, Rebecca Sutcliffe, Dave Wilkinson, Anna Pratt, Amjad Karim, Vaughan Gannon, Andrew Gregori

**Not pictured:** Yaasmin Mughees, Colin McLaren, Cath Ball, David Garner, Amanda Richardson, Bill Lovat, David Austin, Mahmuda Khanom

# What is a Poverty Truth Commission?

The first Poverty Truth Commission was launched in Scotland in 2009. Hosted by Faith in Community Scotland, it grew out of a belief that the wisdom, experience and understanding of people who struggled against poverty was vital in making decisions about poverty. So, on a Saturday afternoon in Glasgow City Chambers, 15 people stood and told stories of their struggle against poverty through drama, dance, speech and poetry. There was laughter, hope and a recognition that whilst life had been tough, they were still standing. The audience of 400 people included 15 leaders from within public life in Scotland. As they reflected on what they had just seen, these leaders acknowledged that if positive change was to be made, they needed to work with those whose stories they'd heard over the coming months.

The first outside of Scotland took place in 2014 in Leeds, and since then 30 locations (and counting) have started on their own journeys. Poverty Truth Commissions seek to discover the answer to the question, 'what if people who struggled against poverty were involved in making decisions about tackling poverty?' The basic structure follows that original model in Scotland: half of the commissioners are people with a lived experience of the struggle against poverty, the other half are leaders within the city or region. Collectively they work to understand the nature of poverty, what are some of the underlying issues that create poverty and explore creative ways of addressing them.

The commissioners for each Commission comprise two groups of people. Around half of the commissioners are people with a lived experience of the struggle against poverty. The other half are leaders within the city or region. Collectively they work to understand the nature of poverty, what are some of the underlying issues that create poverty and explore creative ways of addressing them.

Oldham first started exploring the possibility of hosting its own Commission in 2018. With seed funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Action Together took on responsibility for hosting and pulling it together. After years of discussions (and a global pandemic), further funding from Oldham Council and the local Clinical Commissioning Group helped the project begin in earnest in 2020. Action Together continued project managing, with local charity Shared Health coming on board to support the grassroots commissioners, and Oldham Council's Corporate Policy Team taking on responsibility for recruiting Civic Commissioners. Along the way, we've benefited from exceptional support from the Poverty Truth Network, as well as others including Church Action on Poverty and Galleries Oldham, who have hosted all our get togethers.

## With special thanks to



# Timeline



**2018**

Idea for the Poverty Truth Commission first discussed as part of 'Pies the Limit' lived experience project.

JRF seed funding for Action Together to develop the Commission.



**Sept 2020**

Funding secured with support from Local Authority and local NHS. Facilitation team expanded.

Commissioner recruitment and lived experience sessions begins.



**May 2021**

Small group work for grassroots commissioners focused on unpacking stories.



**Sept 2021**

Commission officially launches, with monthly gathering to get to know each other, understand each other's perspectives, and build ideas about how to change the story of Poverty in Oldham for good.



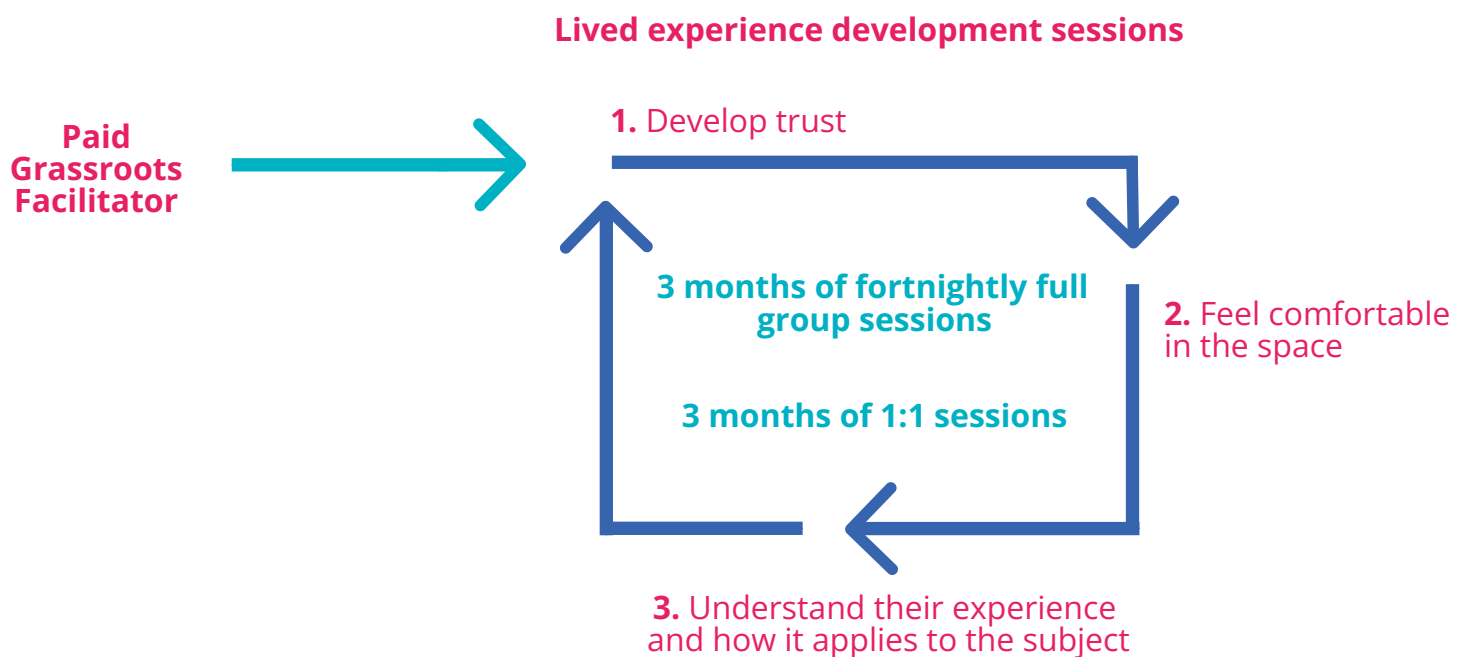
**Sept 2022**

Last formal Commission meeting and 'landing our themes' period starts.

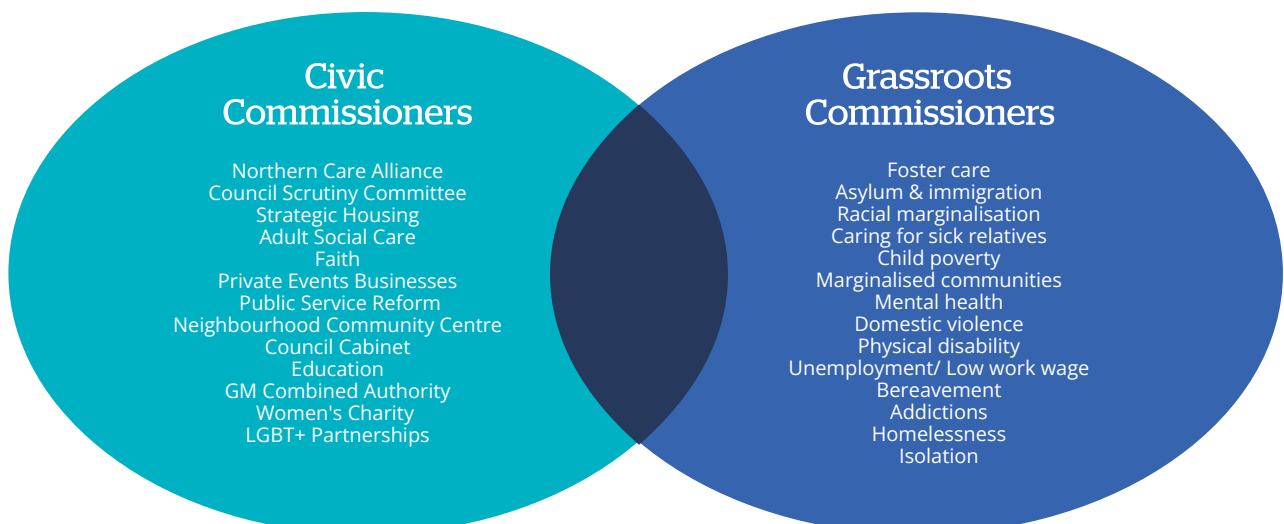
# Stage 1: Forging the Commission

Of the overall total Oldham PTC budget, a third went toward Grassroots Commissioner support, provided by Greater Manchester charity Shared Health Foundation. Of the 2 ½ years since agreement was reached to launch the Commission, a full year went into recruitment and development of Grassroots Commissioners. This was intentional and essential for creating the foundations of what came after, and without it what was built would not be worth it.

## Model of co-production prior to launching the Commission:



## What perspectives and experiences did our Commissioners bring with them into the space?



## How did our Commissioner's define poverty?

'if you do something they come down on you in a flash. if they do something it's not acknowledged.'

Normalising hardships

'It was normal to sleep in train stations... to turn up to work with suitcases.'

Afraid to come out

Access

Loneliness

You end up making excuses to protect your loved ones

An everlasting scar

Abuse

'People say, "you know where we are if you need us", but you don't go because you're scared.'

'Most people don't think "I'm poor".'

Hitting rock bottom

Isolation

Pressure

Knowledge

Power

Money

People come around and you don't know if they are for real or exploiting you

## Testimony: What role did the Commissioner development sessions play in the overall project?

During our Poverty Truth journey we set aside time to gather the Grassroots Commissioners together, outside of the full sessions, for peer support and personal development. These were really important times where relationships were cemented and deepened and where themes and issues could be explored more fully in a supportive environment. These sessions often involved coffee, cake and piles of toast!

We recognised that while we were trying to tackle key issues around poverty, many of our lived experience members were still dealing with these issues on a daily basis, and that some emotional support and a safe space to be open was really important. In addition, members were able to sign post each other to support and some even stepped into new volunteering opportunities encouraged by their peers.

The Grass Roots Commissioners all benefited from these times and at the end of the process many commented that the support and friendship from their peers was a key part of their personal growth journey.

Jo Spurling,  
Grassroots Facilitator Shared Health Foundation





## Stage 2: Launch

The Launch of Oldham's Poverty Truth Commission was designed with the Grassroots Commissioners in order to embrace co-production from the start and set the tone for the Commission. A few features different to other events or Commission launches were included as a result:

- 1) Only Commissioners and the Facilitation Team were invited, with the sole aim of building relationships and understanding. Unlike in other places, members of the public were not invited to be involved at this point.
- 2) Civic Commissioners were explicitly welcomed into the space set up by Grassroots Commissioners, via physical invites from a specific person, who met them at the door and sat next to them at their table.
- 3) Attendees were asked to think about what they wanted to change, in order to change the story of poverty in Oldham for good, but not to draw any conclusions on the day.

How did the experiences shared at the launch make the attendees feel?





## What are we asking to change?

Attendees were given a piece of card to scribble down their draft of what they were asking to change. This was pitched as a draft so that people didn't fix on one answer, but started out with an idea which could then be shaped by the journey the Commission would take them on.

- 
- "How people we come into contact with treat everyone with respect and are trauma informed."
  - Greater understanding of how poverty effects people and so real life. Greater determination to tackle it together.
  - Children and young people have access to the same opportunities as those from other areas.
  - Preventative – before crisis – where to get help? (Professionals and volunteers need to **talk**.)
  - Better care for those experiencing poor mental health; Get better at being able to recognise red flags; more support for mothers during/after labour.
  - Lived experiences voices have a place in spaces where decisions are made – **all** the time.
  - To find how best to support Oldham's citizens to be the best they can be.
  - The way we think about our town and the people who live there.
  - Everyone in Oldham has somewhere to go for help. Improving the system of supporting people who are struggling by understanding their experience and needs better.
  - Change the wider system to reduce inequalities and bring everyone on the journey.
  - To have a plan (solid, achievable) to combat poverty long term that's sustainable, that involves community, private and public sector.
  - Perception of poverty, of symptoms and causes of poverty, solutions available to eradicate it, strategies and policies we can adapt as recommendations.
  - Help people to get the right help at the right time.
  - To prevent suffering and create success.
  - Important to change the way we view how other people live their lives.
  - Decision making: strategic, central, individual.
  - Opinions on poverty: the understanding of what 'poverty' means
  - Policy making and practicalities.

## Case Study - Lynda

Lynda chose to depict her story as a series of steps forward and steps back. With the help of another Commissioner, Simon, she drew big placards which summarised each step. To involve them in the story, Lynda invited a Civic Commissioner to join her at the front and hold the relevant placard. She gathered props from throughout her life to use for extra effect at selected moments.

### STEP 1

#### Looking to the future

I began my journey in December 2018. I was able to start afresh when my marriage broke-down. Being in the marriage was stressful, my ex-husband controlling my finances and behaviour.

### STEP 2

#### Surfing between two temporary homes

I went to live between my daughter in Lancashire and my sister in Yorkshire. I moved every two weeks. I had my own room at my sisters, but at my daughters I was in my 10 year old granddaughter's bed while she went in with her mum.

### STEP 3

#### Reaching new heights, discovering new layers

In Feb 2019 I went to live in an all-women's refuge, where my new life began to change. I grew with enthusiasm toward new activities. My support worker introduced me to Inspire Women Oldham and to the Threshold Peer Mentoring course. Achieving my certificate at the Celebration Event in June 2019, with new friends present, made me feel such achievement and camaraderie.

### STEP 4

#### Three blind mice

I was offered the next step forward and moved into a bedsit in June. The first night people were fighting, I could hear furniture and stuff being thrown. I felt like leaving there and then, and called my support worker who convinced me to stick it out. I did, but I never felt comfortable and I didn't feel safe. I killed three mice in total before finally, I had enough.

### STEP 5

#### I'm home, Dad

A friend invited me to move in with her instead. From my back window, I looked out at the fields that we used to play on as a child. At the bottom of our road was the primary school I watched them build from the ground up. Being "back home" brought back loads of memories, which made me feel close to my family that are no longer here.

### STEP 6

#### "I want her out of my house"

While I was there, the Pandemic hit. My courses stopped, my volunteering stopped, and it affected my mental health. My friend tried to help, but was also suffering with illness herself. We made each other worse, and things deteriorated. Toward the end, she was on the phone to Housing, who asked her if I could stay. I heard her say: "No, I want her out of my house". I went upstairs, packed my backpack, grabbed a hold-all full of knitting gear, a carrier bag with shoes in, put the key on the side and left.

### STEP 7

#### "Learn from your mistakes"

A friend I'd met in the refuge before, along with a support worker I was still in touch with, helped me get into new temporary accommodation with De Paul.

Six weeks later, I was still in bed when I got a call from one of the Housing Officers. It was good news: I had an hour to move to a new place to stay. I was there for 8 months, until I found out they were shutting. I was offered a move back into another HMO, which I didn't want. This time, I found the motivation to get on the internet and find my own place that would be mine for good.

### STEP 8

#### Dreamed it, believed it, achieved it

I did it. I left De Paul with 30 reusable shopping bags, 1 suitcase, 1 backpack, 1 TV, 2 lamps, and countless certificates demonstrating everything that I have achieved. If I hadn't decided to leave my marriage, I wouldn't have had to surf between two homes every two weeks; I wouldn't wait three years until I had my own home; I wouldn't have become a mouse murderer; and I wouldn't have fallen out with friends. I would also not have managed to achieve my goals, meet all these people and be involved with all these wonderful groups and support systems. Where I am now, I get on with all my neighbours. I use my Peer Mentoring with several different groups. I am a Poverty Truth Commissioner.



# Stage 3: Building relationships, uncovering truths

Having established the basis for how we wanted to work together and operate our Commission, we set about exploring each other's perspectives and seeing what ideas and themes floated to the top. These notes outline some of the key questions asked and points shared in the sessions from October to December 2021.



## Session 2 - Focus

- Understanding who we all are
- Assumptions

## Quotes

- "These scars can never be removed."
- "Nowhere does it say 'click here if you are struggling'."

## Key Takeaways

- Stigma of accessing support
- Early intervention vs crisis intervention?
- Simplicity of system vs personalised support
- The system is also frustrated that it can't make more of an impact
- Auditioning for entitlement: Does system want people to be eligible?
- Design system around people likely to be accessing
- Scale of solutions to reconnect us to our tribe



## Session 3 - Focus

- Going deeper
- What would we tell others about the Commissioner's work

## Quotes

- "All the quality analysis is limiting the quality."
- "The system does not give people the time to care."
- "How can we change whilst being overwhelmed."

## Key Takeaways

- Don't forget the 'ladders' and 'sliding doors'
- Support providers don't feel trusted and aren't respected
- Can't only deal with the first issue that presents
- Reflection and understanding vital components of acting
- Precariousness of the system limiting it's ability to respond properly



## Session 4 - Focus

- What do we want to change?
- Can we change it?
- How do we change it?

## Key Takeaways

- Multiple parts to addressing stigma
  - Making more positive opportunities available
  - Benefits/ state support - an entitlement; people should feel able to access, not like a burden
- We have our own real limits to system capacity here in our Commission. What can we learn from this?
- When the system collaborates, it needs to make sure others aren't treated like 'second class citizens'
- Lots of other great stuff going on in Oldham not to forget about (or duplicate)

By the December, two themes had started to come up again and again, and two reflections were making themselves really clear to attendees:

## 1) Themes

Emerging Theme	What do we mean by this?	What might be within our control?
<b>Stigma &amp; Understanding</b>	Importance of understanding of poverty (and how it affects people) as a major way to assist people in dealing with its impact and reducing stigma.	'Co-location' of positive and negative support offers and messages: use of Community Centres, strengths-based comms e.g. 'YOU ARE ENTITLED' campaign; arranging positive activities that support people's dignity and humanity to do more than 'chase the debt away' type crisis support. Fewer means tested programmes (which come with stigma), presented as for everyone and in all places E.g. replicating social support approaches in most deprived schools as default in all. Encourage participation in offers which are there (such as school clubs and activities).
<b>Emotional Intelligence</b>	Significance of approach taken by social support systems when people first reach out for help. This is crucial to responding appropriately to where the person is/how they are likely feeling at that time, and looking beyond the immediately presenting issue which is rarely the only source of difficulty.	Provide input to the Health Inequalities strategy to think about accessing services (this opportunity has come about through some other networks and could be a great way to influence wider Oldham work).  Workloads and time for reflection amongst front line staff.  Listening more effectively to 'customers' - provide training, recruit for empathy.

## 2) Reflections

### i) Precariousness of the system

*Systems of social support are increasingly unable to provide the conditions in which an adequate response can be offered to people or sufficient investment provided to develop the skills and capacity need to resolve challenges, even when there is a great desire to do so.*

We started with 14 Civic Commissioners and 13 Grassroots. By the time of our 'mid point review' in February, 50% of our Civic Commissioners had left or had to substitute in someone else.

The reasons for this turnover were very valid and beyond the control of the PTC:

- Taking on a more senior role due to the departure of the previous post-holder
- Leaving the organisation on long-term sick leave
- Taking a new role in a different locality following Senior Leadership Changes (x2)
- Too much going on in the day job (x3 - one private sector, one VCSE, and one NHS)

This was a tangible demonstration of what was emerging in discussions about social issues contributing to poverty: the people and services that were trying to reduce poverty and its impacts were too stretched, too burnt-out, too under-resourced, to do so effectively. Happening soon after the COVID-19 pandemic, amidst ongoing lockdowns, and a decade of reductions to Council budgets imposed by national Government, this was even more the case while our Commission was meeting.

In so many instances, not being able to do things wasn't about will, it was about capacity.

ii) Co-producing responses

*The Commission was uncovering the instability at the core of Oldham's social support, but it was also discovering a method to fix it; an opportunity to test out a really high-spec model of co-production between professionals and people with lived experience.*

We could see and feel this working effectively, especially when it came to creating equal power relationships, high quality non-judgemental discussions on all sides, and shared understanding of the issues.

A blueprint was emerging which could be applied to help other initiatives and spaces in Oldham better involve residents and be co-produced. They would involve an investment of time, resource, preparation, and adaptability to different people's requirements – all of which the precariousness of the system makes hard to deliver. But we were coming to a conclusion that this investment would be far smaller than the ongoing cost of failing to include people who've experienced a social issue in the efforts to address it.

**Testimony: What role did the relationship building part of the process play in the overall project?**

The "building a relationship" part was very important. We as grassroots commissioners were being paired with one civic commissioner, and getting to know them on a personal level was quite fundamental because how many of us knew any of the civic commissioners on a personal level? Did we ever get a chance to know people who are sitting in big offices, and who are an integral part of the system? Not saying that the lived experience members are not.

Those relationships are still going strong as we still get to see those commissioners involved with other ongoing projects to deal with poverty. We see the empathy in them, and the longing to help people in difficult circumstances, which has been our aim in the PTC Oldham.

Yaasmin Mughees,  
Grassroots Commissioner



## Stage 4: Reaching conclusions

With our ideas starting to crystallise, we took a break from regular meetings in February, and instead scheduled some 'one off' sessions focused on short-term issues to see how they could be applied.

Doing so helped us settle on three final themes which would shape the rest of our Commission:



### Welcoming points of contact

Services that have time to listen well and show understanding and empathy towards people who contact them for help



### Reducing stigma and raising hope

Helping to meet people's basic needs whilst also giving them opportunities to thrive and achieve



### Places of belonging, knowledge and hope

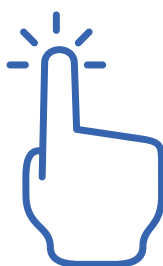
Places where people can belong to a supporting community

Over the subsequent months, we unpacked what was meant by each of these and what we might be able to do with them. We identified a full A-Z of things we could try and get started, and we invited others to join us with a big event in July 2022 with 60+ attendees from across the Oldham System and gathered pledges. We argued, and we joked, we voted and we mapped.

The system wasn't any less precarious, and with fewer Civic Commissioners we had fewer connections to places where decisions could be made. The Cost of Living Crisis was becoming increasingly relevant, its impacts felt by the Poverty Truth Commissioners and more broadly across Council and other services as residents' demand for urgent support increased.

We found ourselves caught between the urgent and the long term.

Laser focus on people in the most desperate circumstances



Interacting with people in the right way, all the time





**Spotlight: Cost of Living Summit and video for Oldham Council**

With concerns about the Cost of Living mounting, Oldham Council organised an all day 'Summit' with a range of key partners, to consider what the response could be to support residents over the winter that year ( winter 2022/23 ).

Three of the Grassroots Commissioners, Simon, Mandy and Andrew, were invited to speak to Summit and frame the challenge based on learning from the Commission. Each of them took a theme, sharing 1) what is meant by this? 2) how does it relate to your experience? 3) how can the audience apply this to what they do?

	<b>Point of Contact (Simon)</b>	<b>Stigma &amp; Hope (Mandy)</b>	<b>Places of Belonging (Andrew)</b>
<b>1) What is meant by this?</b>	It's traumatising to make contact with someone and tell your whole story when you are struggling.	The real crisis for people is often the lack of hope or belief, and its this that makes it stigmatising.	We need local hubs where people can go not just if they have something specific they need, but to be and feel like they belong.
<b>2) How does it relate to your experience?</b>	The right contact, trusted and effective, can become therapeutic and open up so many doors.	The most effective interventions don't just offer crisis support and then sweep people under the carpet, but help people do things themselves, be involved in something bigger and believe there's a life beyond the crisis.	These should have the information about specific offers of support, so that when people do want to access its easy for them.
<b>3) How can the audience apply this to what they do?</b>	As we make more contacts through the Cost of Living crisis, these need to be effective ones.	Our cost of living interventions can't be limited to crisis support, but must offer hope and positivity to avoid stigma and result in long term change.	The more effort we put into making Cost of Living offers available through hubs like this, the more effective they will be.

Following on from this, Andrew plus Nadia and Yaasmin from the Commissioner team recorded a video describing the themes in their own words for the Oldham Council Heads of Service meeting and Executive Leadership Team.

You can watch the video online at: <https://youtu.be/ZPRXtdhC5dw>





We also found ourselves getting invited to more and more other activities, like the Cost of Living Summit, and realised that the focused work was happening, and would continue to happen elsewhere. Our message about how to work together to change the story of poverty in Oldham for good was being picked up elsewhere.

We concluded that our Commission needed to take action on two fronts:

1) Focus our attention as the Commission on *how* things should happen, encouraging everyone everywhere to keep these in mind as they went about their roles with their particular focus.

If these three things were achieved across the social support system, we would have the best chance of changing the story of poverty in Oldham for good.



Theme 1:  
Welcoming points of  
contact

**What?**

Look at presenting issue to understand root causes when first making contact with public/ support and reduce how much people have to tell their story.

**Why?**

"I don't get one-size-fits-all shoes. There's a reason for that."

**How?**

- Adoption of common 'triage' approach for public facing agencies which meets the person's needs first, agency's second (co-produced with people who have experienced hardship)
- Public commitments from public points, train and use named lead in each team for promoting this way of working
- Commitment from senior, political and strategic leads to suspend output targets for teams who are testing it.



Theme 2:  
Reducing stigma  
and raising hope

**What?**

Help cultivate belief and hope when providing crisis support by offering people the chance to be involved in positive things and recognise the differences they make in their community as leaders, carers or through their everyday lives.

**Why?**

"A little bit of hope changes everything."

**How?**

- Support 'Voluntary apprenticeships' for non-paid roles to build confidence and understanding
- Develop an 'Oldham Community Leadership Award' that officially recognises efforts people have put into their lives and communities
- Encouragement from employers to recognise this in their recruitment
- Peer support offer for people who have used crisis support (from others who have made use of it)



Theme 3:  
Places of belonging,  
knowledge and hope

**What?**

Get agencies and support staff out of isolated offices into shared community bases, from which they are closer to the actual places where people go, so it is easier for people to find out what support is available and make use of it.

**Why?**

"Residents don't trust people in offices, shirts and ties. To have trust, officers need to be seen."

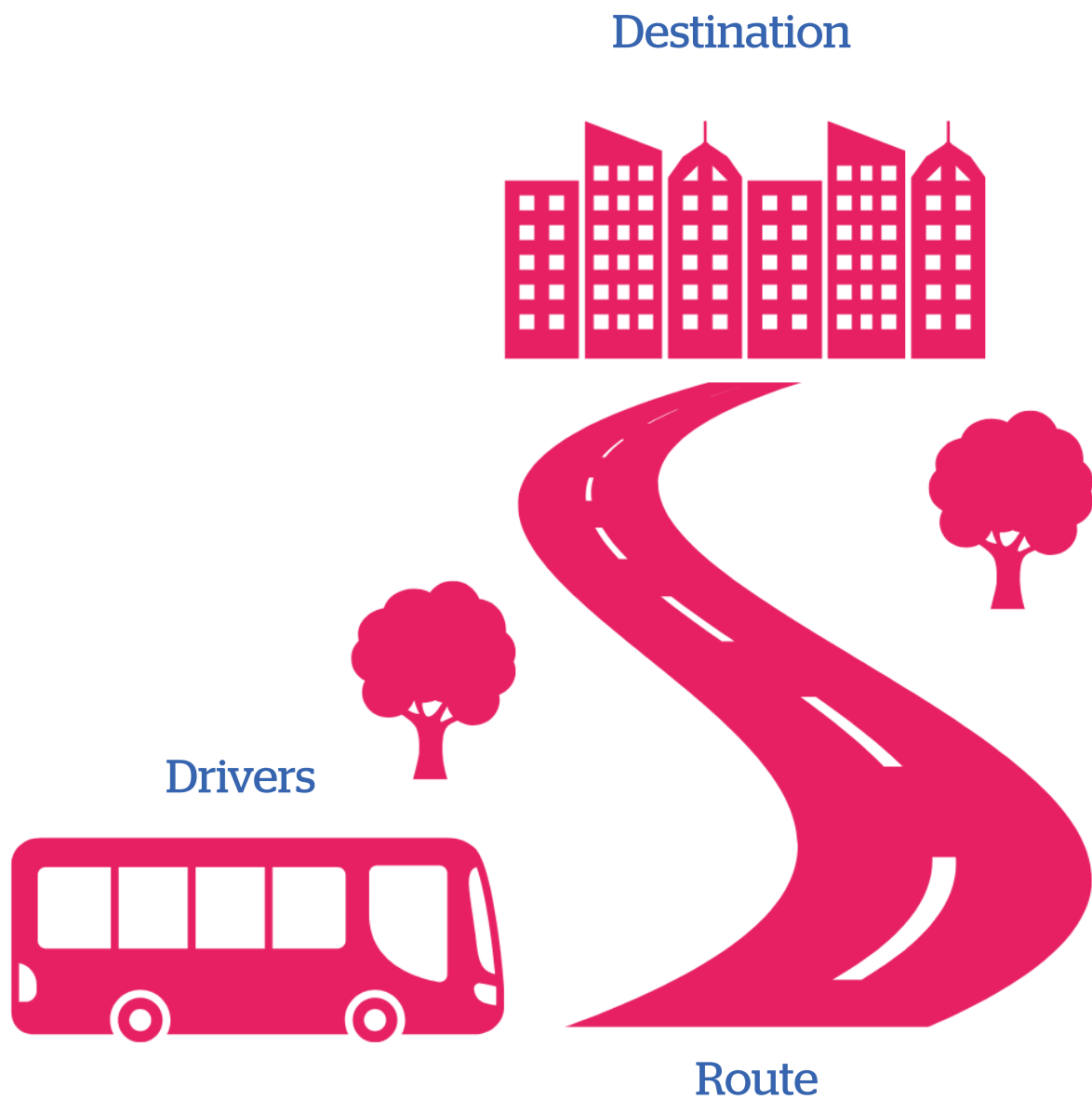
**How?**

- 'Mapping for real' in districts to better understand what places are used by residents
- Influence system partners to rent space from key community locations, keeping wealth local and adding value to all services
- Change recruiting, commissioning, and contracts to include conditions related to this
- Embed in Senior Strategic plans for accountability and drive to deliver from the top down

2) Identify destinations where the *action* could be taken under each of our themes, which we could then join and support them to deliver it.

For each theme, we outlined a 'Destination' (governance space), 'Route' (ideas to put forward there), and 'Drivers' (who could help get there).

We did the same exercise for our Co-production approach so we could encourage other parts of the system to take up our *way* of doing things also.



## Stage 5: Achieving our ambitions – and sharing them



Welcoming points  
of contact

**Destination:** Oldham Cost of Living Working Group

**Route:** Cost of Living frontline staff training

As part of Oldham's response to the 2022/23 winter 'Cost of Living Crisis', training was devised by the Council's Organisational Development team on usage of a Money Advice Referral Tool. The plan was to offer this training to professionals and volunteers working on the frontline who might come into contact with people struggling in the months ahead.

The tool – developed as part of a project with Greater Manchester Poverty Action – is about getting the right *information* to people struggling with financial difficulties. It helps residents in the Borough access the financial support that they are entitled to, gives them confidence to navigate out of crisis, and helps create a 'no wrong front door' approach across the frontline.

Based on our discussions about Welcoming Points of Contact, the Commission identified this tool and training as a key part of what we wanted to encourage more of in Oldham. The missing element which had come through in our discussions was that people sharing the tool would need the right *empathy*. The more the training could help frontline workers understand what people are going through when they are in crisis, and how to adapt support to meet their needs, the more effective a point of contact they would be for anyone struggling with the cost of living.

To ensure that the people attending the training really understood why it mattered, our Grassroots Commissioners also committed to attending each session and contribute to discussions. That way, more people working closest with those experiencing hardship would be prompted to reflect themselves on what it is like to be in poverty and hear directly from people with lived experience.

Between October 2022 and March 2023, Commissioners supported 44 sessions in all 5 districts of Oldham. They contributed to the training of over 350 people delivering frontline support – deepening an understanding of welcoming points of contact and cultivating the skills involved in creating them.

The Cost of Living Group continued meeting over the course of the Winter, taking on board the learning from the suite of activities and approaches including the training. With the short-term crisis receding, but ongoing challenges no less significant, the Group will be evolving into a newly established 'Oldham Partnership Board'. This will continue encouraging more Welcoming Points of Contact across the borough.



Reducing stigma  
and raising hope

**Destination:** Oldham Poverty Action Network

**Route:** Cost of Living frontline staff training

The Oldham Poverty Action Network has taken up the mantle of the Commission. With a core of Grassroots Commissioners drawing on their experience of hardship to inform the direction, the Network has drawn in more partners from across the public and voluntary sector, and funding from the Local Motion group of national foundations.

The Network, facilitated by Action Together, has identified three 'Action Groups' to make progress on their shared areas of work:

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

With a budget of £100,000 it is able to test out ideas, and proposals being put forward for longer term funding, one of the areas Task Group 2 is looking to achieve is a model of volunteering which will 'reclaim volunteering for people experiencing hardship'.

The aim is to recognise the ways people in poverty often already participate in their communities. To encourage these strengths as a route out of spiralling hardship while helping improve their own skills, health and wellbeing.

With a number of Commissioners attached, the Task Group is working on a volunteer model which enables someone to start their journey as a service user (e.g. of a food bank), to a volunteer helping provide support, to a leader supporting other volunteers in the same position, to using those skills in employment or whatever else they want to use their time and energy for.

The Task Group has identified these key things which would need to be implemented to achieve this:

- Capacity for organisations to host and develop volunteering opportunities
- Built in recognition and reward framework
- Links to employers including foundational economy and local public sector anchors, redesigning traditional recruitment processes, and work placements using an alternative skills model.
- Strengthen the connection between the Volunteer Centre brokerage and the DWP.
- Providing enterprise start up grants and / or connecting to existing business grants as part of the pathway.



**Destination:** Place Based Integration Task & Finish Group

**Route:** Planning for Real events

Places of belonging,  
knowledge and hope

Members of the Poverty Truth Commission have attended “Planning for Real” events in each of Oldham’s five districts, helping to identify key community assets as part of a mapping exercise to inform future decisions in relation to the place-based integration of services. The mapping not only included physical buildings and spaces, but the presence of existing public and voluntary services and community networks.

Discussions are ongoing about the nature of the services provided in district, informed by the mapping exercises the strategic re-modelling of services to support early intervention and prevention and for example, the creation of Warm Spaces in the borough as part of the Cost of Living Response.

It is intended that the district hubs are welcoming places where residents can get help, information and advice when they need it, make links to other services and access opportunities for learning and development.



**Destination:** Integrated Care Partnership Board

**Route:** Oldham Engagement Framework

Co-production

The Poverty Truth Commission was a blueprint for how high-spec co-production could happen in Oldham, but did not happen in isolation. It has contributed to an understanding across the borough of how “the council must reassess the way in which it delivers services moving away from the traditional paternalistic model of service delivery –*being done to* – to working with residents and partners as equals to understand the needs of the community and identify the most appropriate solutions.”

That statement was lifted from a report delivered to the Resident First Steering Group in October 2022, and later the Board of the new ‘Integrated Care Partnership’ overseeing NHS activities in Oldham. The report made recommendations to develop a system-wide Engagement Framework, committing resource, energy and strategic attention to how residents are involved in and inform all decisions in the borough which affect them.

Working with colleagues from Oldham Council, NHS and Voluntary Sector, the Commission approaches are being hardwired into this Framework. So far, a model has been developed for each level of ‘engagement’ which is needed to effectively achieve ‘nothing about us without us’ in Oldham, and what is needed to implement it. Including not just **how people share their views**, but **where they go** and **how the people who need to can hear them**, the ambition is a shared set of approaches which can drive up engagement with residents across the activities of Oldham Council, the NHS and the voluntary and community sector.

## How do you want to share your views?



## Testimony: Outcome for Individuals from the Poverty Truth Process

"Through Poverty Truth they've opened up doors for me. I feel very very settled now in my life. I've never felt this settled before. I've just made so many friends, the people feel like my family.

Since then I've come on leaps and bounds – my life has actually never been better. I'm now also a volunteer at OL1 Barker Street Community Centre. They're my family too. We've all made a commitment, to the people in the community but also to ourselves. It's about giving something back. You've been helped, I've been helped and it's just so nice to be in that position.

It was the best move ever that I made moving here. I just want to say thank you Oldham! I love you!"

Mandy Ugbomah  
Grassroots Commissioner



Some of the things our Grassroots Commissioners are doing now/ since



Speaking in Westminster at the All Party Parliamentary Group on Temporary Accommodation



Co-leading community support hubs and food pantries for people struggling with the cost of living



Piloting a Personal Improvement Programme based on lived experience of disadvantage



Sitting on the Greater Manchester board overseeing adult support and services



Organising community collections of items to send in response to floods in Pakistan



Travelling overseas to pick up an International Award for participation in public policy



Exhibiting at Oldham Business Expo



Volunteering with the Council Youth Service



Presented findings at GM Challenge Poverty Conference



Cooking meals for hundreds of people using ingredients from a community allotment



# Stage 6: Learning from our Commission

## What is next for the PTC?

Like a child nurtured through school and waved off at the train station when they leave home, the Poverty Truth Themes are now out there in the world. We raised them as a Commission, and we'll watch with pride as they make their way, but we're content for them to succeed or fail based on their own merit.

Each of the 'Destinations' identified continues to progress the ideas given into their care. Commissioners continue to get together via the Poverty Action Network, a vehicle which is able to grow the pool of people involved in this work. To sign up and participate in the Network, check out the upcoming dates on the Action Together website:

[www.actiontogether.org.uk/events](http://www.actiontogether.org.uk/events)

To understand more about the journeys of the Commissioners and how they relate to our themes, check out this video made with the support of local media company Kupod Productions: [www.actiontogether.org.uk/social-action-oldham](http://www.actiontogether.org.uk/social-action-oldham)



**Yaasmin**  
Points of Contact



**Simon**  
Stigma and Hope



**Mandy**  
Places of Belonging



**Lynda**  
Co-Production

Most importantly, what would some of our Commissioners say about their experience and the impact either personally, professionally, or because of their role?

Before...	But now..
I was an angry activist who was battling everyone, from the council to residents.	I've gone from 'Guy Fawkes' to 'Ghandi', understanding that there is no need to battle those that have the same goals.
I was confused, overwhelmed, wasn't sure of the outcome. Will we ever succeed, will we be heard or seen?	We are being heard. We have been acknowledged by different sectors. We have continued our journey.
I lacked confidence. I was isolated. I was lonely.	I am happy, excited, busy and involved.
I was full of anticipation, but frightened.	Happy and anticipating the continuation of our work.
It was good to be involved with the group.	I have been able to be more open with myself and have great open relationships with other members.
I had a voice but wasn't sure 'professionals' felt the same as I did or we could influence things for the better.	Can finally see things are beginning to change.