

Wandsworth Cost of Living Commission : 2nd evidence gathering session: Housing and Fuel

Date: 28 February 2023 at 14:00 -16:35

Venue: Alton Community Hall, 1 Petersfield Rise London SW15 4AE

Objective: To capture the lived experience of the impact and key drivers of the cost-of-living crisis looking at housing and fuel costs, to then identify potential longer-term solutions and actions for the Council, partner organisations and Wandsworth communities.

Attending the meeting:

- Ian Tattum - Joint Chair
- Dorian Leatham - Joint Chair
- Councillor Kemi Akinola - Vice Chair
- Professor Alex Colas
- Toby Costin
- Lauren James
- Tylor Maria Johnson
- Professor Tim Lang
- Gillian Norton
- Cathy Warwick
- Liz Moreton

Apologies

- Kath McDonnell, Commissioner
- Beverley Corson , Commissioner
- Arshad Daud, Commissioner
- Cristina Motoca, Alton Play school (comments provided to secretariat)

Wandsworth Council officers

- Peter Quirk: Secretariat
- Alice Addison: Secretariat
- Bethany Pepper COL programme

Observer

- Jeremy Ambache, Mayor
- 2 residents

EVIDENCE

1. Mary-Ann Foxwell, Wandsworth Citizens Advice

Key Issues:

- Citizens Advice Wandsworth has submitted several case studies to Commissioners for evidence
- CA has received money from the council which has improved service delivery. However, data is reflective of capacity rather than need, more people hired the more people CA are able to help. One key issue is that where before, advice was transformational, now they see repeat customers regularly.
- Hardship issues increasing- every month the data breaks record, shows need for crisis support rising.
- Repeat need is increasing & many are confused by benefits system.
- Housing issues, including landlord issues and evictions

Recommendations/solutions included for the council to work with CAW as a strategic partner, run take up campaigns & provide long term investment in service delivery, providing certainty which enables CA to plan, improve the housing support given to resident in crisis, and support for those facing hardship.

2. Paul Ahearn, Samuel Estates

Key Issues:

- Decrease in rental properties available causes supply and demand crises that prices people out and enables landlords to increase rents.
- New EPC regulations and changing housing legislation puts landlords off the sector.
- Issues with the standards of housing, impacted by cost of heating, increased people in small living spaces, and working from home

3. Conor O'Shea- Policy, Public Affairs Officer, Generation Rent

Key Issues:

- Current market is threatening rights of tenants with hesitation to seek improvements because of fear of eviction. Local authorities can step up enforcement standards, e.g. more environmental health officers.
- Low take up of vouchers sent out as top ups, winter support payments etc.
- Recommendation to propose a national landlord database- registered on online system.

4. Charles Einloth, Chair of Cadnam Point Residents Association

Key Issues:

- Struggle from council tenants to have issues tended to.

- Recommendation to connect residents' associations and Council.
- Investment required- net gain of social homes

5. Sharon Azams – Roehampton Students Union

Key issues:

- Impact on students- cutting back on food, impact on mental health, increase use of food banks, less on heating.
- Complex issues- exacerbated by other issues, e.g. food disorders through cutting back.
- International students often not eligible funding
- Low take up of support- student hardship fund, cheat meals, community fridge. The student's language barrier also causes issues alongside lack of financial literacy.
- Stigma of food banks – reducing but still issue
- Lots of students choosing between food and commute to campus, laundry, no nutritional meals, less energy to interact/engage in student activities, losing morale, cannot afford to be a student essentially.

6. Nikki Rosner, Rackets Cubed

Key issues:

- Rackets cubed work with surplus food provided, particularly in food space in Roehampton, started out as emergency crisis support.
- Now based on social supermarket model- particularly successful
- Model- contribution of £4 if they can afford it and get £35 of food.
- One positive learning is far less food waste- customers choose what they get, hour slot, blue room, red room is more expensive, with a token system
- As much fruit and vegetables for free as possible, toiletries and hygiene products are harder to find
- Since going to social supermarket model last May, more than doubled numbers, accelerating and the need is there.

7. Kate Moon – Little Village

Key issues:

- Started in 2016, now 3 hubs in Wandsworth, 1 in Roehampton
- Main focus on families with children & babies under 5, and circular economy and reduced waste.
- Grown recently- Output, volunteer, donations couldn't meet demand so made decision to place weekly cap on number of referrals accepted.
- Model provides dignity to service users which is crucial- and also supports wellbeing of service users.

- Highest and most combined reasons- food, benefits and housing.
- Solutions- more collaboration, more community-based working and the council needs a role in this, understand where pressure points are, increase access to council space for VCS organisations.

8. Giles Read, Thinking Works, helping fuel poverty

Key Issues:

- Change in demand – significant increase.
- Demand previously 629 households supported, around 900 now, and predicted to be double by end of the year.
- Crisis aspect of services is a huge shift as rise of damp and mould in social housing and rental sector - Rise in deaths and increased pressure on onward services, CA, SWL law centre as a backlog of case load.
- Issue with windows and EPC problem
- Private rented vs social - housing issues
- Social sector- not enough housing stock, not good enough quality.

9. Bethany Pepper, Wandsworth Council

- COL Council Programme Manager overseeing the COL Fund- update on current council initiatives.