



# Wandsworth Cost of Living Commission

Interim Report  
July 2023

## Joint Chairs Foreword

We hope that this interim report, and the final version when it is completed, will not only be helpful for Wandsworth Council, who commissioned it, and the residents of our borough, but for all those concerned with mitigating, and seeking long term remedies for the Cost of Living Crisis.

This report is primarily focused on the four themes of Food, Fuel, Housing, and Transport, as well as an overview of general areas, and a Place Based method of enquiry has been taken throughout. One great advantage of this is that all the Commissioners have been able to engage directly with community organisations and individuals and hear their stories from within their context- this has been both informative and profoundly moving. The outcomes of this approach, coupled with local data, has re-enforced our understanding both of the complexity of the current situation and the many threads that connect every aspect of it.

This interim report summarises what we have done so far, how we have conducted our conversations, and our initial findings and recommendations. There is no doubt in our minds that the current crisis is not a temporary blip, caused by short term economic factors, but one with a long history behind it, which will require long term, systemic and creative remedies, involving both local partnerships and national strategies. We are grateful for the commitment and expertise of our fellow commissioners and the fruitful ongoing dialogue with the council and its officers.

We wish to thank all our fellow commissioners, our support staff in Wandsworth Council, plus all the partners and participants who have contributed to developing the outcomes from the themes so far.

**Dorian Leatham** Joint Chair

**Ian Tattum** Joint Chair

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## Executive Summary

**The Wandsworth Cost of Living Commission commenced its programme of work in November 2022, it sits alongside the work the council is doing to mitigate the impact for Wandsworth residents through the Cost-of-Living programme. The Commission has a remit to identify potential actions that Wandsworth Council, its partners, the wider community, regional and national government could take to address the longer-term systemic issues and drivers of the Cost of Living crisis for local people.**

The Commission consists of fifteen independent commissioners who have been appointed to provide a breadth of knowledge and understanding of the elements of the Commission's work, Wandsworth communities and the sub regional and national context of the Cost of Living crisis.

Although independent of the council, the Commission's programme of work is closely aligned with the work of the council and key anchor organisations across the public, voluntary, community and the business sectors, that is currently being undertaken to help and support Wandsworth citizens with the impact of the Cost of Living crisis.

The Commission is using a Place Based approach which aims to understand the causes and drivers of the Cost of Living crisis in Wandsworth, by seeking the views of residents, local organisations and public sector partners and using this intelligence to inform the work and interventions it undertakes.

The Commission will then use this understanding of Wandsworth to develop recommendations.

The Commission has a focus on the key areas of food insecurity, fuel poverty, access to affordable housing and transport, but, also takes account of other factors based on the evidence and insights provided to date.

These include the cost and availability of childcare provision, and the consequential impacts of the crisis on the physical and mental health of Wandsworth communities.

At the halfway point in the programme of work, the Commission seeks to use this Interim Report to provide a summary of the approach and work undertaken to date. In addition, the Interim report highlights a range of short-term recommendations for immediate action that have been shared with relevant council teams and the Wandsworth Council Cost of Living programme team.

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The report also identifies some of the emerging longer term and systemic themes that will be further explored during the rest of the work programme with the objective of having a draft report to share with partners and the community for validation and review in the autumn of 2023.

# 1 Introduction and Background

In response to the current cost of living crisis and alongside a programme of immediate support, Wandsworth Council decided to establish an independent Cost of Living Commission in order to listen to residents and local organisations as well as looking at all available data and research, to identify potential actions that we, our partners, the wider community, and regional and national government may be able to take.

There are fifteen independent Cost of Living Commissioners who bring a range of expertise and perspectives to the Commission's work. They all live and are connected to Wandsworth, and are from a range of backgrounds, including academia, business representation, local leaders, and subject matters experts. This mix of skills and experience will ensure that they are able to contribute local context, knowledge and understanding to the work and findings of the Commission.

The Commission is jointly chaired by Ian Tattum, Vicar at St Barnabas Southfields, and Dorian Leatham, Independent Consultant, previously senior Director and Chief Executive in Local Government. Councillor Kemi Akinola (Deputy Leader of Wandsworth Council and Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, business engagement and culture) is the Vice Chair, providing the link between the Commission's findings and the council's current projects and initiatives, allowing synergy between the two.

The Commission was launched in November 2022, beginning with an introductory meeting where commissioners were provided with data on the real impact of Cost of Living pressures for Wandsworth residents along with national insights from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the regional perspective from the Centre for London and a detailed oversight of the Wandsworth Cost of Living programme.

The Commission will last for one year, concluding its work by Winter 2023.

## The Commissioners

### Vicar, Ian Tattum - Joint Chair

Vicar of St Barnabas Church, Southfields

### Dorian Leatham - Joint Chair

Independent Consultant & Ex-Senior Director, Local Government

### Councillor Kemi Akinola - Vice Chair

Deputy Leader of Wandsworth Council,  
Lead on voluntary sector, business engagement and culture.

### Professor Tim Lang

Professor of Food Policy, City, University of London

### Professor Alex Colas

Professor of International Relations, Birkbeck, University of London

### Lauren James

Senior Consultant, MP Smarter Travel Consultancy

### Kath McDonnell

Officer, Battersea, and Wandsworth Trade Union Council

### Arshad Daud

Community Leader, Balham, and Tooting Mosque

### Cathy Warwick

Non-Executive Director, Kingston Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

### Gillian Norton

Chair of St George's University Hospital, NHS Foundation Trust.

### Youth Perspective Representative

Keziah Gordon, Wandsworth Youth Participation Officer

### Tylor Maria Johnson

Senior Policy and Data Analyst, Policy in Practice

### Beverley Corson

CEO, Wandsworth Chamber of Commerce

### Toby Costin

Director, Crewe Energy

### Liz Moreton (Nov 22-May 23)

Senior Producer, Battersea Arts Centre

## Approach

The work of the Commission is grounded in the Wandsworth community and has throughout adopted a Place Based approach targeting the specific circumstances in Wandsworth, to engage the community and a broad range of local organisations from different sectors as active participants.

Through formulating recommendations integrally linked to the evidence heard and reviewed by the Commission, the Commission will be able to propose solutions that are specifically aligned to the intricate issues facing all our residents.

The scope of the Commission is focusing on the four key elements of the Cost of Living crisis: Food, Housing, Fuel and Transport. The Commission is focusing on medium to longer term solutions and interventions, whilst immediate support is being provided by the council's Cost of Living Programme and partner organisations to support Wandsworth communities.

The core task of the Commission is to determine what actions Wandsworth can take to mitigate the Cost of Living crisis for residents, with the main objectives being:

- 1 To examine and define the multiple factors which are driving the Cost of Living crisis in Wandsworth.
- 2 To review a national and local evidence base of literature, studies and Commissions looking at the causes and impacts of the Cost of Living crisis.
- 3 To engage with local Wandsworth communities using a Place Based approach to gather views, information, and solutions at a community level.
- 4 To consider the whole system drivers and impacts and develop system-based solution.
- 5 To develop a series of long- and medium-term recommendations which can be used to inform systemic changes in Wandsworth.
- 6 Where appropriate, to use these recommendations as the basis for representations to inform regional and national government policy .

## Methodology

### Meetings

The approach of the Commission has thus far involved a set of evidence gathering sessions in community settings, and Commission meetings, alongside desktop research and intermediary meetings. The evidence gathering sessions have a thematic and/or geographic focus, enabling the Commission gather evidence from witnesses and review the area under consideration. This evidence is then collated and analysed and used to inform the development of recommendations made by the Commission.

The Commission meetings are held in the Town Hall and bring the Commissioners together to consider the evidence received, review any additional online submissions of evidence, plan for future sessions and formulate initial ideas for recommendations.

So far, the Commission has received presentations and evidence from over forty organisations at the three evidence gathering sessions held in community venues in Battersea, Roehampton, and Tooting, along with three Commission meetings in the Town Hall which involved reviewing and planning.

The meetings of the Commission are held in public, and the detail of discussions and the lived experience examples along with the findings are documented by the secretariat for the Commission.

### Engagement

As part of the Place Based approach, the Commission has also developed a consultation and engagement approach that helps to provide the Commission with the views of the community on key elements of the Commissions programme. The Call for Evidence, which includes both an online survey, and option to respond with comments via email, and specific format for Wandsworth organisations to give strategic responses, was launched in March and closed in April.

The engagement approach also includes independently facilitated focus groups held in community venues across the borough. These are planned to take place in May and June and will involve identified groups who are specifically vulnerable to the impacts of the Cost of Living crisis. Results from both the online consultation and the focus groups will be considered by the Commissioners and directly feed into the final report.

### Final Report

The development of the final report will be led by the independent Joint Chairs and will be independently authored and agreed by the members of the Commission, it is due to be published in November 2023 and will detail the findings of the Commission and recommendations that can be delivered locally as well as those which will need action by others, regionally and nationally. In the spirit of openness ,the public will have online access to our findings and therefore be able to digest our findings for themselves.

# 2 Causes and drivers and impact of the Cost of Living crisis

## Definition

The Cost of Living crisis is defined as the fall in 'real' disposable incomes (adjusted for inflation and after taxes and benefits) that the UK has experienced since late 2021.

Inflation is calculated as the average change in the price of typical goods and services purchased by UK households over 12 months. This is tracked using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), calculated by the Office for National Statistics using a sample of 180,000 prices of 700 common consumer goods and services.

## Nature of inflation

In the UK, the price of consumer goods and services rose at the fastest rate in four decades in the year to October 2022. The annual inflation rate dropped slightly from 9.2% to 8.9% between February and March 2023 but was still high compared with recent years.

During the same period, total pay (including bonuses) for employees rose by 5.8% in January to March 2023. Regular pay (excluding bonuses) rose by 6.7%. Looking at incomes (adjusted for inflation) growth in total pay fell by 3.0% and regular pay dropped by 2.0% over the same period.

## Causes of inflation

After many years of low inflation and sustained growth in the UK economy, the spectre of inflation returned during 2021 and 2022 with the consequent impact on the cost of living for many citizens. The causes of this inflation come from a range of sources including depleted gas supplies in Europe (e.g., nearly 80% of households in England are heated by mains gas and a third of electricity is generated in gas power station).

However, the fluctuations of the international energy market are not the only significant factors, others include the consequential impacts from the war in Ukraine from a food and energy supply perspective, and longer-term economic shock factors such as the impact of the global pandemic and restrictive access to EU markets on UK supply chains and consequently the cost of products and services.

**Looking at the Commission's four main themes the key drivers of inflation are:**

Theme	Key drivers
<b>Energy (Fuel)</b>	Mainly due to supply/demand issues and impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, wholesale energy prices increased rapidly from the second half of 2021 onwards. Electricity prices in the UK rose by 65.4% and gas prices by 128.9% in the year to December 2022
<b>Food</b>	In addition to increased energy and transport costs involved in food production and logistics, reduced cereal exports from Russia and Ukraine have seen food prices rise by 16.9% in the 12 months to December 2022. Without promotions, the same basket of food costing £43.52 in April 2022 costs £50.84 in December 2022 at one of the UK's leading supermarkets
<b>Housing</b>	A lot of this is down to the simple laws of supply and demand, due in the main to landlords leaving the market to sell their properties during the post-pandemic housing sale boom and renters re-entering as London recovers from the pandemic. This has had the consequence of significantly increasing private rental prices. In London, private rents increased by 4.0% in the 12 months to December 2022.
<b>Transport</b>	The cost of fuel peaked in July 2022, prices have been falling recently, though the cost to fill up a petrol family hatchback has still increased from approximately £68 to £71 between December 2021 to December 2022. The Mayor of London announced on 18 January that TFL travel fares are due to increase by an average of 5.9 % on 5 March 2023 in line with national rail fares.

## Which prices are changing?

Increases in the costs of consumer goods and continuing strong demand from consumers (post pandemic and the rise of online traders) and some supply chain bottlenecks (both Europe and international), have been the key factors causing rising inflation in 2021 and 2022.

Food prices have also been rising sharply over the past year and were 19.1% higher in March 2023 compared with a year before, a 45-year high.

Energy prices are another important driver of inflation with household energy tariffs and road fuel costs increasing.

In London and other major UK cities the increasing cost of housing particularly in the private rented sector continues to be a major issue. Rightmove statistics indicate that the average asking rent for properties new to the market increased by 19.3% in Inner London between July - September 2021 and July - September 2022.

## Which households are most impacted?

According to the Office for National Statistics, 93% of adults in Great Britain reported an increase in their cost of living in April 2023. In addition, the OBR expects real post-tax household income to fall by 4.3% in 2022-23, the biggest fall since comparable records began in 1956.

**Some of the key impacted groups in Wandsworth and London are as follows:**

### Wandsworth

- 28% of children lived in households with an income of less than 60% the UK median after housing costs have been subtracted in 2020/21. This was around the same as the average London Borough.
- 12% of residents were estimated to be earning below the Living Wage in 2021. This was better than the average London Borough.
- Pay inequality as measured by the ratio of wages at the 80th percentile to the 20th percentile in 2021 was worse than the average London Borough at (2.86).

### London

- Low-paid Londoners are especially vulnerable to the price shock, with real wages for the lowest paid in London decreasing since the financial crisis, falling by 3% for the 10% lowest paid in London (compared to a 12% increase at UK level for the 10% lowest paid).
- According to the Trust for London, in the capital 'non-discretionary spend will increase substantially, with the lowest income households in London required to spend more than 80% of their budgets on essentials, such as food, energy and housing.
- Food is one of the largest pressures pushing London's inflation above the national average, in addition Londoners continue to spend a larger share of their income on housing compared to UK.
- Pay growth in London has tended to be strongest in the best-paid sectors (e.g., Finance, Media, IT) and lower-paying sectors have seen slower growth, reinforcing income inequalities.
- A survey of Londoners in December 2022 stated that lower-income, renting, disabled, unemployed and Londoners from some ethnic minorities were more likely to report that they were struggling or going without.

# 3.1 Emerging Findings

## General theme

### Evidence sources

Evidence for this theme has been provided by a range of local organisations across the evidence gathering activities of the Commission, including Wandsworth Citizens Advice, the Battersea and Wandsworth Trade Union Council, Health perspectives from Healthwatch Wandsworth and youth group perspectives via Wandsworth Youth Council and Wandsworth Councils Youth Participation officer.

Alongside the four key themes that the Commission is focusing on, there has also been continuous discussions around more general areas linked to the cost of living crisis and challenges residents are facing.

These general areas, which have been both mentioned at evidence gathering sessions by community and strategic witnesses, and found commonly in desktop research conducted by the Commission are:

### Benefit take-up and complexity

Within Wandsworth and particularly evidenced by the Wandsworth Citizens Advice Service, there are significant issues in the numbers of people not claiming the benefits to which they are entitled, including free school meals, Healthy Start vouchers and universal credit, which then consequently links to other benefits.

In addition to this, the complexity of the benefits system has also consistently arisen as a key issue for both Wandsworth residents and as a key problem area for Citizens Advice Staff. People face significant difficulties when navigating the system and trying to find out their eligibility to benefits, completing the forms required and gathering the required materials to support their claim. This challenge is particularly heightened for those with English as a second language and those who may be digitally excluded, where there are challenges in accessing website & scanners and completing online forms.

### Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) capacity and burn out

From Food Banks to Age UK to smaller charities, the Commission has found that there is an exponential rise in demand of the voluntary and charity sector support services, which began due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 but has since increased because of the Cost of Living crisis.

The VCS are also facing issues with recruiting and retaining volunteers and having sustainable funding. There have been several sessions where witnesses have highlighted the importance of the approach of the council to the VCS, and particularly within this, being seen as a strategic partner.

### Joining up services/sharing information

The need for a more joined up approach across the Wandsworth system has been heard consistently across evidence gathering sessions. For example, within the voluntary and community sector there is significant support for two-way flows of information and data between council services and the data that VCS organisations are able to gather. This was supported by witnesses including local food banks, community dieticians and charities providing crisis support.

### Increasing evidence of need

The increasing evidence of need was heard by the Commission at the launch in November from national organisations including Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) and London based think tank Centre for London and continues throughout the evidence gathering. Trussell Trust, the national food bank organisation, alongside local food banks have regularly reported to the Commission that they are seeing an increase in people coming to use their services. Wandsworth Citizens Advice (WCA) also provided, alongside detailed case studies of need, data around the relationship between the beginning of the Cost of Living crisis and the increasing demand on their services. WCA data shows that there was an increase in people presenting with hardship issues in almost every ward in the borough. This has been supported by both the data provided by Wandsworth Councils Insights and Analytics team and emerging data from the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT).

### Compound impact

Commissioners have heard throughout evidence gathering activities of the compound impact of cost of living, for example where the inability to afford adequate heating can cause issues with damp and mould in houses which contributes to health issues. Other examples heard by the Commission are from those working in food banks, where service users are unable to afford energy bills to fuel ovens and cookers at home and therefore turn to food bank services.



## General Theme - Recommendations

### Short term

#### Benefits support

- Examine options and approaches to promote benefit uptake, including developing and expanding the use of data from the LIFT project to implement targeted interventions.
- Develop a lobby and campaign position working with London Councils and the Local Government Association (LGA) exploring the benefits, potential impact, and legal and practical barriers to auto-enrolment of appropriate benefits.
- Support the LGA/London Councils lobby position to encourage DWP to improve the access to Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data for targeted recipients.
- Increasing crisis support available to vulnerable residents
- Examine the value and opportunities for cash payments and cash first approaches.

#### Supporting the VCS - Strategic

- Approach the VCS and Citizens Advice Wandsworth as strategic partners.
- Review council and partners' estates and buildings to identify potential community spaces that could be used to support VCS activity and interventions designed to mitigate the impact of the Cost of Living crisis.
- Encourage more data sharing and joint working between the council and the VCS (with two-way information flows)
- Review the grants model for VCS to encourage more collaborative working.

#### Income

- Review the implementation date for full living wage accreditation for all council outsourced services.
- Use council commitment to Real Living Wage (RLW) as a call to arms for all businesses and organisations in borough to take similar action now.
- Develop lobby positions: Trussell Trust and JRF Guarantee Essentials campaign, and Universal basic Income models.

#### Affordable Childcare:

- Map the availability and affordability of childcare provision for working families in the borough.

#### Health impact of the COL crisis:

- Examine the development of Cost of Living support through Community Champions to provide awareness of support availability.
- Consider using community hubs as a focus for Cost of Living support.
- Explore a range of support options with Health partners (for example, funding support for targeted families, social prescribing & social welfare models and Community wellbeing Hubs)

### Longer term

- Consider an approach to becoming a "Union Friendly" borough.
- Review benefits policy (Universal Basic Income (UBI) & Cash first)
- Build a framework for responding to the compound impact of Cost of Living crisis.

## 3.2 Emerging Findings

### Food theme

#### Introduction

The Food theme for the Commission is led by Professor Tim Lang, Emeritus Professor of Food Policy at City University. The Commission has gathered a more developed range of evidence for this theme than the other themes in the first half of the work programme, with two meetings dedicated to the theme; an evidence Gathering Session with invited local community organisations in Battersea in December 2022 and a Commission meeting in March 2023 with online contributions from a number of leading national and regional organisations which campaign around food insecurity and for sustainable food solutions.

#### Objective

The objective of the food theme is to capture the current state of food and the impact of the Cost of Living crisis in the borough and make recommendations about what, if anything, can be done to improve the situation.

Key lines of enquiry

- 1 Having a clear and measurable definition of Food Poverty.
- 2 Examining the causes of household food insecurity.
- 3 Measuring the impact of food insecurity in Wandsworth
- 4 Determining what the impact of Cost of Living crisis has been on food insecurity.
- 5 Exploring community-based solutions to improve the situation in Wandsworth.
- 6 Capturing the lived experience in Wandsworth.
- 7 The health impact of the Cost of Living crisis, immediate impact on diet and longer-term health implications.
- 8 Mapping food provision in the retail /wholesale/manufacturing system in Wandsworth.
- 9 What recommendations would make a difference and what could the council do (using the levers and powers they have Public Health /Planning)?
- 10 Who are the other players in the system, what additional powers and resources are required, what type of system change is required to make big shifts for Wandsworth communities?

#### Evidence sources

Evidence for this theme has been provided by local organisations: the Wandsworth Food Partnership, the Wandsworth Food Bank, The Earlsfield Food bank, the Wandsworth Older Peoples Forum, The Wonki Collection, Community Box by Rackets Cubed, Little Village, youth group perspectives via Wandsworth Youth Council, and Community Dietitians from St George's University Hospital and Queen Marys Hospital.

In addition, a range of national and regional campaigning organisations and think tanks who are experts in the areas of food insecurity and sustainable food systems. These included: Trussell Trust, Feeding Britain, The Food Foundation, Sustain, London Food Board, Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency.

The Commission also reviewed the Wandsworth Schools Food Strategy with a presentation from Head of School Support Services and Traded Service Children Services, Wandsworth Council.

#### Definitions of food insecurity

The Food Foundation model looks at food insecurity through the lens of affordability and access to food using three linked criteria asking the question "Have you or anyone else in your household (in the last month or six months):

- had smaller meals than usual or skipped meals because you couldn't afford or get access to food?
- ever been hungry but not eaten because you couldn't afford or get access to food?
- not eaten for a whole day because you couldn't afford or get access to food.

The internationally recognised approach developed by the US Department of Agriculture definition uses six questions and a frequency metric for each of the statements with a timeframe of the last 12 months, the questions are:

- 1 *The food that (I/we) bought just didn't last, and (I/we) didn't have money to get more.*
- 2 *(I/we) couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.*
- 3 *Did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?*
- 4 *How often did this happen?*
- 5 *Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?*
- 6 *Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?*

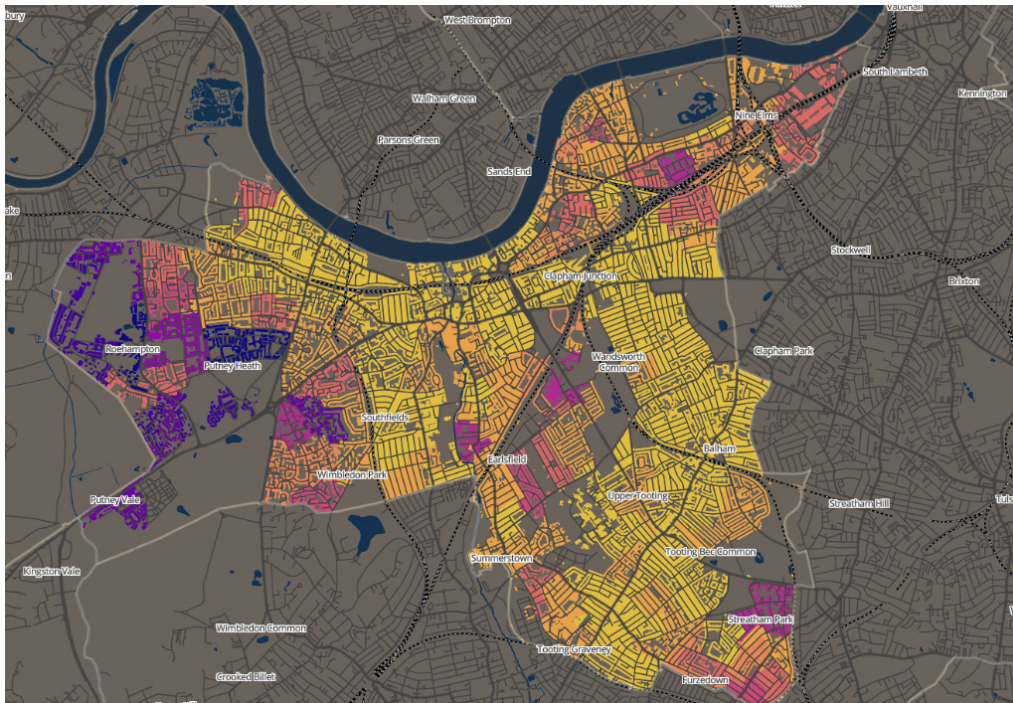
## The Wandsworth picture

An estimated 14.2% of adults experience food insecurity in Wandsworth (36,930 adults), the 12th highest ranking across London. According to a survey commissioned by the Food Foundation that was conducted by YouGov in Jan 2021, in Wandsworth:

- 5.8% (15,130) adults suffered from hunger
- 14.2% (36,930) struggled to access food
- 14.6% (38,030) worried about not having enough food

26% of pupils in Wandsworth are known to be eligible for Free School Meals – ranking 13th highest of 32 London boroughs. The proportion eligible has increased from 17.5% in 2018/19 to 26.3% in 2021/22. There are approximately 2,050 pupils who are known to be eligible (registered) for Free School Meals (FSM) but not taking them. Estimates of under-registration rates indicate that there could be approximately 1,100 eligible pupils not registering for FSM in Wandsworth.

## The Food map for Wandsworth



The Priority for Places Food Index, An Output of the Consumer Data Research Centre, an ESRC Data Investment, ES/L011840/1;ES/L011891/1' to the food map in Wandsworth

The Healthy Start scheme is for pregnant women or those with children under 4 and receiving a qualifying benefit to buy healthy food and milk. Uptake in Wandsworth is 68% - ranking 7th out of London boroughs. There were 694 eligible for the scheme that were not taking vouchers between September 2021 and March 2022.

The Priority Places for Food Index aims to identify neighbourhoods across the UK that are most vulnerable to increases in the Cost of Living through lack of accessibility to cheap, healthy, and sustainable sources of food. It combines data on proximity and accessibility of food shops, availability of online deliveries, socio-demographic characteristics, and other factors to produce the overall index. The lowest deciles are most at risk and the highest deciles least at risk. Most areas within the bottom five deciles across Wandsworth were in the west of the borough – covering most of Roehampton and some areas in West Putney and West Hill.

## Evidence



Visual Minute from Evidence Gathering Session, by Thomas Humphreys, Royal College of Arts

## Food Banks and increasing food insecurity

Evidence was provided by the Wandsworth Food Partnership of burnout in the local VCS community, due to the impact of the Covid pandemic and now the Cost of Living crisis. Earlsfield Food Bank commented on the extreme increase in severity of people's problems, and changes in the way people are eating with clear evidence that people are not eating for several days along with the eating vs heating conundrum. Citizens Advice Wandsworth also commented on significant increases in referrals for food and fuel vouchers. The Roehampton University Students Union representative commented that based on a recent student survey, 96% of the respondents have cut back on food, with consequent impact on mental health, and increased their use of food banks.

Trussell Trust provided evidence of increasing need in London with Food banks experiencing their busiest periods, with record levels of need, with a recent survey finding that rising Cost of Living inflation is a real issue with 1 in 6 people struggling with bills.

## Moving on from Food Banks

Earlsfield Food Bank described the issue of the conflation between food waste and food aid, and issues around the quality of donated food. Trussell Trust provided information on the work with Leeds City Council on the cash first approach, and commented on the state of hunger and the telling fact that most people who go to food banks are in receipt of benefit income. Concluding that broadly food insecurity is a symptom of wider problems, where people do not have enough income to afford essentials, which drives the need for emergency food aid. Trussell Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation made the case for their campaigning position for an "Essential Guarantee" for the benefits system, using data on the cost of essentials calculated by an independent body. Rackets Cubed provided a case study example of how they had developed their initial food bank model into a thriving local social supermarket in Roehampton. Little Village provide a more holistic and overarching model in three locations in Wandsworth, with a hybrid offer that includes a baby bank/ social supermarket augmented by a delivery service and support offer including a client liaison team who provide a signposting and guidance service. Wandsworth Food Bank (Trussell Trust) and Citizens Advice have developed a Food bank advice project which provides help with benefits applications to customers.

## Free school meal update and universality

The Food Foundation have launched a kids' food guarantee containing a set of expectations around what is needed. They also outlined campaigning positions on FSM including the Feed the Future initiative and approaches to expanding provision and auto enrolment. Representatives made the case for the universality question, in relation to addressing stigma, the comparison with other free aspects of the state education offer, and the potential for reduced overall cost for caterers providing an expanded service offer for more children.

## Healthy Start scheme

Wandsworth Food Bank suggested more promotion of the Healthy Start initiatives through education and awareness campaigns. Sustain suggested an approach using designated people who act as central point of contact with knowledge about the scheme to increase uptake. The London Food Board representative provided examples of approaches to encouraging uptake of the scheme. Feeding Britain has also commenced work on a national Healthy start champions scheme to maximise take-up.

## Food insecurity and food choices

Wandsworth Food Bank commented that there was no shortage of food in the borough, highlighting that the issue is a shortage of money, and that despair is tangible with a significant impact on people's mental health. Wandsworth Older People's forum commented that elderly people are more likely to know how to cook and younger people less so, and that the changes in gender roles had also impacted on the skills of people to prepare and cook fresh foods.

## Food strategy and infrastructure

The Wonki Collective (a local start up), provided examples of a different approach to food retailing, moving away from a reliance on the big six retailers for local residents. There was recognition by the Commission that further evidence and a deeper understanding of the Food System in Wandsworth is required to inform the development of longer-term systemic recommendations and options. The Commission also suggested examining local food councils as a way of building wider food partnership.

Think Tank Feeding Britain provided examples of approaches to systemic change to eliminate hunger in the UK. The Food Foundation commented on the income problem looking at both wages and benefits with food insecurity higher in Universal Credit receipt households, who are often households in work. They also commented that the food system environment has a powerful influence on diet and made a plea for a rebalance of price/availability and appeal of food.

Campaigning organisation, Sustain, provided a template for developing a Food Strategy for Wandsworth based on their Good Food for all Londoners assessment model. The Greenwich Cooperative Development agency provided examples of their work in developing a sustainable food system in the area including growing food schemes, a healthy hospitality and retail charter and approaches to community meals. Feeding Britain suggested that the council could use its convening power to link up local affordable food projects with a credit union, so that residents can save up money and/or access affordable credit each time they visit a pantry/food club/social supermarket. They suggested that the coverage of affordable food provision should be mapped, and a plan developed with the Wandsworth Food Partnership for meeting any gaps in coverage which are highlighted by this exercise. It was also suggested that the council's procurement department should explore opportunities through its social value work, to secure additional supplies of food for affordable food projects.

The Commission were also provided with an update on the development of the Wandsworth Schools Food Strategy.

## Access to hot meals

Local Community Dietitians provided evidence that there is an issue regarding the access to delivered hot meals locally; with many carers not having time to cook the meals and the patients desire for hot nutritious food, they also commented on the rise in malnutrition, particularly among older people caused by the cost of living crisis. Social prescribing of food solutions was also suggested along with the trend in the Cost of Living crisis for people requesting prescribed supplements in place of food.

## Food Theme - Recommendations

### Short term

- Develop a Food Strategy for Wandsworth which includes: building community capacity, mapping food insecurity, exploration of new food supply options for focussed areas, support transition from food aid to food trade models, develop growing food projects
- Looking at the value of a Healthy hospitality catering and retail charter based on best practice examples such as the Greenwich model.
- Create Healthy Start Champions within the community to support take-up of healthy start vouchers.
- Develop mechanisms to increase take-up of food support, including Free School Meals and Healthy Start vouchers.
- Explore the development of Meals on Wheels and home delivery system for people struggling to make their own meals.
- Develop lobby positions: the role of big six retailers in Food inflation, Universal free school meals.

### Longer term

Research and develop an approach that targets the diverse needs of Wandsworth communities including the:

- Mapping of affordable food provision
- Holistic solutions to support those in food poverty who may be facing other challenges related to low-income, for examples affordable food projects linked to Credit Unions.
- Mechanisms to support transition from food aid to food trade
- Procurement: supporting and nurturing local food businesses, based on best practice such as the Preston approach.

## 3.3 Emerging findings

# Fuel theme

### Introduction

The theme of Fuel for the Wandsworth Cost of Living Commission encompasses energy costs, the cost of fuel for transport and the associated issues with the increasing price of these. The Fuel theme is led by Commissioner Toby Costin, Director of CREW Energy.

### Objective

The objective of the Fuel Theme is to develop a range of local ideas which will provide longer term solutions to tackling fuel poverty for communities and businesses in Wandsworth.

Key lines of enquiry

- 1 Develop a clear and measurable definition of what is fuel poverty.
- 2 What are the elements of fuel poverty? (Including fuel poverty gap, household income, energy requirements and fuel prices)
- 3 Who is impacted, how are they impacted and what are the subsidiary impacts (Working with key groups in stakeholder mapping)
- 4 Who might fall into fuel poverty in the future and considering future proofing scenarios?
- 5 What are the systemic issues, nationally, regionally, and locally?
- 6 Identify potential barriers (for example, decreasing energy usage /retrofit /capital funding requirements, social housing, and tenure challenges).
- 7 What are the key barriers and who are the associated stakeholders?
- 8 How does this link to other elements of the Commissions work?

### Evidence Sources

Evidence for this theme has been provided by local organisations, Thinking Works, CREW (via Commissioner, Toby Costin), Wandsworth Older Peoples Forum, Roehampton Students Union, youth group perspectives via Youth Participation Officer, and Wandsworth Citizens Advice.

In addition, the Commission has considered a range of data and information from desktop research from a range of national and regional campaigning organisations, End Fuel Poverty Coalition, Fuel Poverty Action, London Fuel Poverty Partnership, Fuel Poverty Research network along with case studies from the University of York and University of Leeds.

### Definitions

Fuel poverty in England is measured using the Low-Income Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE) indicator. Under this indicator, a household is considered to be fuel poor if:

- they are living in a property with a fuel poverty energy efficiency rating of band D or below

and

- when they spend the required amount to heat their home, they are left with a residual income below the official poverty line

Before this recent revision, fuel poverty was defined depending on whether a person spends +10% of their disposable income on energy. Fuel poverty is defined by End Fuel Poverty Coalition as the 'condition by which a household is unable to afford to heat (or cool) their home to an adequate temperature.'

### Causes of Fuel issues in Cost of Living crisis context

There are three primary drivers of fuel poverty:

- Energy consumption and energy efficiency- Energy inefficient properties require people to need more energy to adequately heat their homes, increasing their energy consumption and therefore energy costs. Improving the energy efficiency of households can bring households out of fuel poverty.
- Income- The income of a household affects people's ability to pay to heat their homes to an adequate level. It also affects people's ability to pay to improve the energy efficiency of their household.
- Energy prices- The price of energy greatly affects the ability of people to pay to heat their homes adequately. Between 2021 and 2022, gas and electricity prices rose by 45% in real terms.

### National picture

Under the new LILEE metric, the number of fuel poor households in England in 2022 was estimated at 3.26 million, representing approximately 13.4 per cent of all English households. In 2022, the average fuel poverty gap (the reduction in fuel costs needed for



a household to not be in fuel poverty) was estimated to be £338 and the aggregate fuel poverty gap across all fuel poor households was £1.10 billion. The Department for Energy Security and Net-Zero estimate that in 2023, fuel poverty will rise from 14.4% as the average fuel poverty gap is expected to rise by 31% in real terms to £443.

## The Wandsworth picture

Both witness testimonies given at the Commission’s evidence gathering sessions and the data analysed by Wandsworth Council’s Insight and Analytics team can provide a reflection of the fuel issues within the Cost of Living crisis facing our residents and the relevant statistics for Wandsworth.

## Fuel Poverty

- Approximately 12,099 households in Wandsworth are in fuel poverty (2020)
- According to the department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS), Wandsworth has the 2nd lowest percentage of fuel poor households in London (excluding City of London).
- However, there are parts of the borough where almost a quarter of households are fuel poor. Areas with higher concentrations of fuel-poor households include Tooting, Furzedown, Roehampton, Latchmere and Patmore.

## Wandsworth Prepayment Meters

- 11% of properties across Wandsworth had pre-payment meters in 2017, compared to 14% across London : there are parts of the borough where up to 45% of households have pre-payment meters.

## Wandsworth Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Ratings

- 63,500 low energy efficiency homes across Wandsworth
- At least 40% of homes in the borough have low energy efficiency: ( 16,800 rated and 46,700 rated D) , with high concentration areas: Balham, Wandsworth Town, and Lavender.
- 5,700 low efficiency homes (D-G) where household income is below £30,000 (High concentration areas in Shaftesbury & Queenstown, Roehampton, Tooting Bec, Furzedown, Battersea Park and Falconbrook)
- 2,700 Low-efficiency (D-G) private rented or owner-occupied homes with household income <£30,000 across Wandsworth
- Low income, energy inefficient households might have the additional burden of increasing private rents and mortgage repayments – the distribution of these households is similar to the above.

## Evidence



Visual Minute from Evidence Gathering Session, by Thomas Humphreys, RCA.



The second evidence gathering session in February of the Wandsworth Cost of Living

The commission focused on the theme of fuel, alongside housing and other related issues, held in Roehampton. The attendees gave testimonies/statements around the issues of fuel, fuel costs and fuel poverty and how this is affecting them in the Cost of Living crisis.

### Struggles in paying energy bills in winter & subsequent issues such as damp and mould

Challenges faced by residents in paying rising energy bills over winter and thus the subsequent damp & mould issues were cited both verbally by representatives from Wandsworth Citizens Advice and included in several written case studies that the local advice service submitted to the Commission as evidence. They gave both data around their client needs and lived experience case studies of client's challenges. Below are quotes from these case studies:

- 'We are seeing clients choosing not to heat their homes, even if they have children or are facing illness which requires heating. This choice is exacerbating disrepair – particularly damp/mould - which landlords then do not address blaming tenants for not opening windows.'
- 'Clients can be confused by pre-pay and smart meters. Furthermore, some do not understand how energy costs work let alone what they are entitled to and how to get it.'

Linking to the next key issue, Giles Read, Director of Thinking Works, said that part of the increase in crisis services is due to the increase in damp and mould problems in the social housing and rental sector, which is primarily caused by inability to heat homes adequately and overcrowding. The closure of the green homes grant inhibiting any route to receive a grant for boilers has caused reluctance of landlords to improve homes in the rental sector and this can be perpetuated by the hesitation of tenants to raise issues of damp and mould with their landlords due to the competitive nature of the rental sector.

Toby Costin, Director of Crewe Energy and Commissioner with expertise in Fuel and Fuel poverty presented to the Commission around the issues facing children in fuel poverty:

- Twice as likely to suffer chest and breathing problems.
- Increased incidence of cold and flu
- Likely to be sick for two to three times longer than other children.
- Increased incidence of asthma

### Significant increase in demand for crisis support from VCS orgs

There has been a significant increase in demand for crisis support from the voluntary community sector and statutory sectors. The Director of Thinking Works commented that there had been significant and unsustainable increase in demand of crisis support for those in fuel poverty (over 100% seen by Thinking Works) including the increase in £49 fuel vouchers.

### Issues with energy efficiency of housing stock

Housing standards, often the result of poor energy efficiency, (meaning higher energy bills and high risk of inadequately heated homes due to costs) is a significant issue within Wandsworth. Paul Ahearn, Director of Samuel Estates outlined a range of associated issues between the rising cost of fuel and housing:

- New EPC regulations discouraging landlords from staying in the sector as improvement works are expensive and often inconvenient for older houses, additionally landlords may not be aware of or want to upgrade housing stock due to timings and costs, meaning houses aren't upgraded despite support being available.
- Heating costs, and their consequential reluctance to turn on heating by tenants, alongside structural issues, and inadequate ventilation, is causing significant issues with damp and mould in rental properties.



## Fuel Theme – Recommendations

### Short term

- Education and knowledge sharing - Increase awareness of energy efficiency support, especially targeting fuel poor homes. This will include energy-saving advice and insulation schemes.
- Collaboration with PRS landlords to encourage take up of upgrading schemes and support investment into energy saving. This will involve communication with stakeholders in the Wandsworth private rental sector to increase knowledge and understanding of the support and schemes available for landlords to help installations and improvement. In addition, this will help the overall scheduling of upgrading the private rented sector housing stock, as new regulations are expected to be implemented in coming years.
- Incremental support with lower-cost equipment – as the fabric-first approach which involves more structural works can cost significant amounts requiring upfront capital investment, the Commission recommends a step-by-step approach that involves supporting the awareness and purchasing of lower-cost approaches such as:
  - 1 Behavioral change- boilers down to 60°, draw curtains at dusk.
  - 2 Below £100: Small measures- draught excluders, chimney balloons, door brushes
  - 3 Between £200-£600- Install smart thermostats, smart TRV and loft insulation.
  - 4 £500 - Balance heating system/Powerflush
- Interventions to resolve damp/mould such as ventilation and air changes, installation of trickle vents and warm air vents, advice on drying clothes and other behaviors.
- Improve links to GP services (cold weather trigger) and social prescribing to support interventions.
- Encouraging residents to apply for all of the government grants that are available for property insulation upgrades.
- Review approach to warm spaces in preparation for Winter- take learnings from 22/23, consider use and purpose.

### Longer term

- Reviewing approach to energy efficiency.
- Review best practice ideas:
  - Research and review options for bulk purchasing schemes. For example, looking into best practice such as the Leicestershire group buying for solar, reviewing buying clubs and looking at private sector purchasing power. The Commission will work with lead Commissioner, Toby Costin, to review options, including collective switches to green tariffs, collective LED purchases and collective draught excluder packs. There are many benefits to this approach including cheaper pricing can get those hesitant involved, raises the climate action profile and contributes to a sense of collective action and community spirit.
  - Research and review social tariffs approach to provide more targeted support which could be evidenced to be more progressive and more cost-effective in the longer term.
  - Look into Demand Flexibility Service, which has been developed to allow the electricity system operator to access additional flexibility when national demand is at its highest.
  - Examine insurance policy approach which involves targeted awareness raising for those approaching retirement to do specific energy efficiency improvements to ensure lowers bills during retirement.
  - Consider approaches where landlords pay their fair share (using ETHER data/Wandsworth data sets)
  - Research and review approaches for low carbon neighbourhoods.
  - Consider the development of a quality mark from the council, having an awards system on energy efficiency.

## 3.4 Emerging findings

# Housing theme

### Introduction

The Housing theme explores the issue of the impact of the Cost of Living crisis on the cost and availability of affordable housing in Wandsworth. The theme is led by Dorian Leatham, Joint Chair of the Commission, an experienced local government housing professional. The Commission has to date looked mainly at the impact of the Cost of Living crisis on the private rented sector in Wandsworth at the meeting held in Roehampton in February 2023.

### Objective

The objective of the Housing theme is to review the impact of the Cost-of-Living crisis on housing costs for Wandsworth residents, identifying potential longer term systemic solutions for people in different tenures and circumstances.

### Key lines of enquiry

- 1 Defining the problem- Definition of Housing Poverty (Housing cost induced poverty)
- 2 Who is impacted (key groups /types of tenure)?
- 3 Gathering the lived experience examples of the impact of the COL crisis on housing costs and the actions that people have taken to mitigate this impact.
- 4 Reviewing Private Rented Sector affordability and supply in Wandsworth.
- 5 Reviewing the social housing market in Wandsworth.
- 6 Reviewing the situation with Wandsworth Council Leaseholders (COL impacts).
- 7 Considering the impact of the changes in the mortgage market (Wandsworth owners with a mortgage)
- 8 Reviewing the impact of COL crisis on homelessness in Wandsworth.
- 9 Looking at the impact of overcrowding /under occupation issues.
- 10 To develop a range of community-based solutions focusing on the national, regional, and local aspects.

### Evidence Sources

Evidence for this theme has been provided by local organisations; Samuel Estates (South West London), Cadnam Point Residents Association, Roehampton Students Union, Rackets Cubed (Roehampton), Little Village, Wandsworth Older Peoples Forum, Thinking Works and Wandsworth Citizens Advice, youth group perspectives via Youth Participation Officer, local resident attendees and national campaign organisation Generation Rent.

In addition, the Commission has considered a range of data and information from desktop research from a range of national and regional organisations, The Housing & Finance Institute, Shelter, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, London Councils, Acorn, Trust for London and local housing and tenure data from Wandsworth Councils Insights and Analytics team.

### Definition of housing poverty

Households are considered to be in poverty if their income is 60 per cent below the median equivalised income (a measure of household income that takes account of the differences in a household's size and composition), after housing costs for that year (Trust for London definition).

### The Wandsworth picture

Around a third of properties are privately rented in Wandsworth (with 49,830 housing rented from private landlords in 2021) meaning that Wandsworth is in the top ten in London for the proportion of properties privately rented. Wandsworth rental prices for properties are also generally in the top ten. With highest concentrations in areas around major transport hubs, and corridors: including Battersea, and wards along the Northern Line and Southwestern Rail corridor.

There is a real issue with private renting affordability, even with relatively higher incomes, local tenants are spending a sizeable proportion of their income on rent. Private rental for a one bed dwelling as a percentage of gross pay for Wandsworth is 6th Highest in London and 6.6% above the London median.

There were 33,915 Households owning with a mortgage in 2021, with the prices for Wandsworth higher than the London median for all housing types, but especially for detached and semi-detached homes. In Wandsworth it is estimated that 25% of dwellings have been bought with a mortgage and that 18% of dwellings are owned outright (London 21%). With increasing mortgage rates, the average London mortgagor could be paying up to £5,500 a year more in interest costs by the end of next year.

There are 26,544 households renting from the local authority/housing associations, this figure has remained steady over the last 8 years. In Wandsworth it is estimated 19% of dwellings are social rented (compared to 23 % across London). Wandsworth Council is the largest social housing provider and the largest private registered providers in Wandsworth are Optivo, Peabody Trust, London & Quadrant Housing Trust, and Wandle Housing Association.

## Evidence



Visual Minute from Evidence Gathering Session, by Thomas Humphreys, RCA.

### Fixing the private rented sector

Wandsworth Citizens Advice provided examples of increasing requests for advice, and trends in the private rented sector, including changes in behaviours of landlords, astronomic rent increases and people forced into unsustainable tenancies. Potential solutions included measures to encourage more landlords into the market, exploring the potential value and impact of a rent cap and introducing a landlord accreditation scheme to promote good practice in the private rented sector. There was also a call to “reinstate the tenant’s champion role to liaise with private sector landlords, reduce landlord-tenant issues and help protect tenants from poor practice.”

The Commission also considered the pros and cons of a local landlord licencing scheme and the potential for a national scheme being developed through the Renters Reform Bill.

### Fixing the housing market in London

Samuel Estates called on the government to provide a consistent and targeted housing policy to support the market get back to the position before Covid, commenting on circle of doom with supply issues caused by landlords selling up and demand exacerbated by first time buyers struggling to get an affordable mortgage, having to stay in rental market. Generation Rent stated that Wandsworth Council although not able to deal with problems alone, would be a good place to start, with Local Authorities being able to step up enforcement standards.

Samuel Estates suggested that the council should consider moving into the private rented sector (as a landlord) providing additional supply and an income stream to fund new affordable housing schemes.

### Providing support and advice on Housing issues

Wandsworth Citizens Advice raised the issue of getting discretionary housing payments paid, commenting that many councils implement the schemes differently. A range of solutions were suggested by Wandsworth Citizens Advice including a rent deposit/rent in advance scheme, provide homelessness support to people who are experiencing severe hardship as a result of the practice of exploitative landlords and commit to only placing homeless residents in temporary accommodation that is equipped with essential items (bed, fridge, cooker etc).

A representative from a Housing Association Tenants Association commented on the need to connect these tenants with the council support services and other support services in relation to the impact of the cost of living crisis and service delivery problems. Roehampton Students Union representative commented that many students were reticent to deal with their income and cost related housing problems, due to a “someone else worse off” mindset and welcomed the opportunity to work with the council and VCS colleagues to provide opportunities for developing more support and advice for this cohort.



## Housing Theme - Recommendations

### Short term

- Develop Lobby position: for a national landlord database and unlocking freeze on local housing allowance.
- Research further best practice around local landlord accreditation schemes and consider a framework for Wandsworth, in order to promote good practice in private rented sector. This should be done alongside awareness of the progress of national regulation changes associated with the Renters Reform Bill requirements for local authorities.

### Longer term

- Consider how the council could provide more support to clients who are not likely to obtain social housing due to long waiting times with other housing options such as mutual exchange and mobility schemes.
- Consider how the council could provide homelessness support to people who are experiencing severe hardship from exploitative landlords
- Commit to only placing homeless residents in temporary accommodation that is equipped with essential items (bed, fridge, cooker etc.) where needed.
- Consider and review options for low-cost housing solutions and availability of social housing and the use of Community Infrastructure Levy funding.
- Exploring targeted housing models .
- Consider how the council could improve liaison with private sector landlords.

# 3.5 Emerging Findings Transport Theme

## Introduction

The theme of Transport for the Wandsworth Cost of living Commission encompasses the cost of transport, transport accessibility and the associated issues with the increasing price of a variety of transport. Through evidence gathering sessions, desktop research and collaborative meetings with stakeholders, the Commission is gaining a picture of the transport-related cost of living issues within our communities. The lead Commissioner for this theme, Lauren James (Senior Consultant, MP Smarter Travel) has supported the work so far on the transport theme. Due to the order of the themes within the project timeline, the transport theme is the most recent area of focus and the future work planned to develop this theme further is outlined below.

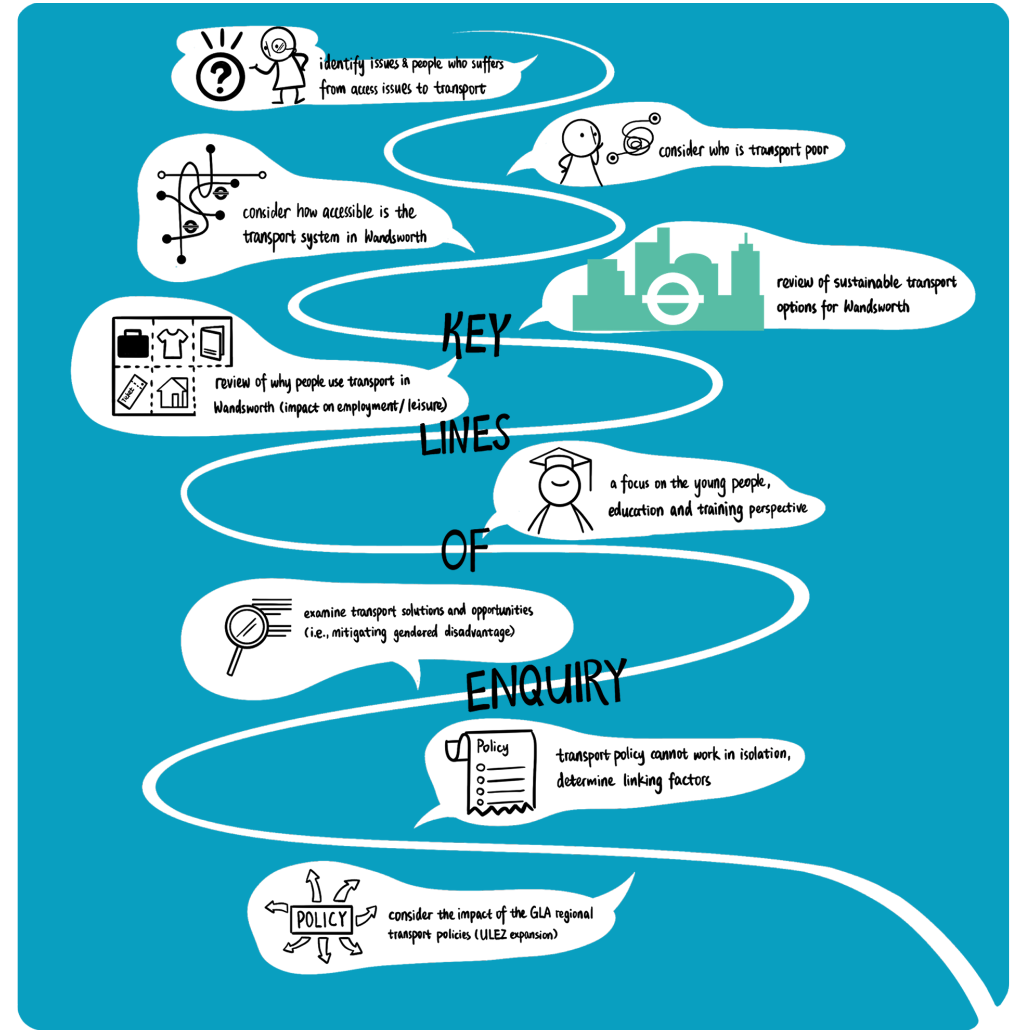
## Overall Objective

The objective of the transport theme within the Commissions evidence gathering is to review the transport system in Wandsworth and identify systemic solutions to improve access to transport issues in a sustainable way for all Wandsworth citizens.

Alongside gathering perspectives from a variety of groups, the Commission is focusing on groups with disproportionate access to transport, which is caused by costs, but also disproportionate access which increases the impact of the Cost of Living crisis. E.g. Focussing on those struggling to access transport because of cost?

## Key lines of enquiry

- 1 Identify the key issues and who suffers from low levels of access to transport.
- 2 Agree a clear definition of transport poor and identify who is within this category
- 3 Consider how accessible is the transport system in Wandsworth.
- 4 Review of sustainable transport options for Wandsworth.
- 5 Review of why people use transport in Wandsworth (impact on employment /leisure).
- 6 Maintain a focus on the young people, education, and training perspective.
- 7 Examine Transport solutions and opportunities (including mitigating gendered disadvantage)
- 8 Determine linking factors to ensure transport policy is not delivered in isolation.
- 9 Consider the Impact of the GLA regional transport policies (for example, ULEZ expansion)



Visual Minute from Evidence Gathering Session, by Jiazhen Cai

## Evidence Sources

Evidence for this theme has been provided by local organisations; Wandsworth Cycling Campaign, Wandsworth Older Peoples Forum, representative from Wandsworth Councils Transport Strategy Team and regional and national organisations including Centre for London, Sustrans, Wheels for Wellbeing, Human Forest (cycle share scheme), Katherine Low Settlement, youth group perspectives via Youth Participation Officer, and Construction and Innovation representative from Transport for London.

In addition, the Commission has considered a range of data and information from desktop research from a range of national and regional campaigning organisations, Mayor for London Transport Strategy, Transport for London and local transport data from Wandsworth Councils Insights and Analytics team.

## Definitions for Transport issues

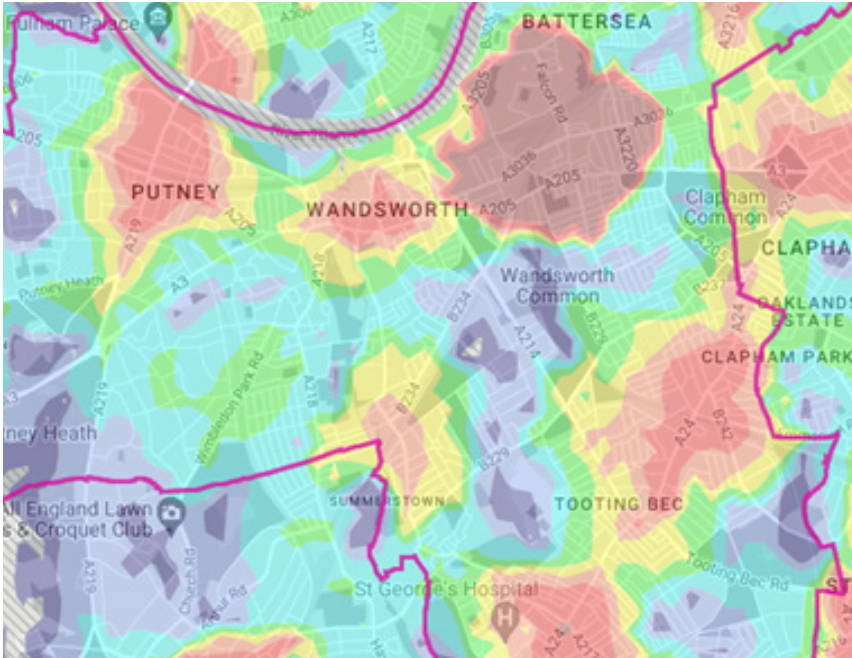
With input from Commissioner, Lauren James, the Commission has developed the below definitions and profiles which help build a picture of who is most affected by transport issues.

Transport poor Definition (at least 2 of 3):

- **Affordability:** Is the percentage of income spent on transport more than twice the national median? Is the individual particularly sensitive to price increases relating to transportation, such as fuel costs or fare increases?
- **Safety & Adequacy:** Does the individual have reliable transport options which are safe to use and are adapted to suit his or her needs relating to accessibility?
- **Availability & Alternatives:** Does the individual have at least one viable transport option, including active or micro-transportation as well as public transportation to meet their needs? Do these alternatives mean the individual can avoid the use of private transportation without significantly increasing their travel time?

## Profiles of transport poor:

- Profile 1** Young people living in rural & suburban areas: Less likely to participate in educational and social activities.
- Profile 2** Persons with impairment with a persistent disability: Difficulties accessing health services and basic amenities. Reduced access to social activities.
- Profile 3** People living in the city in a situation characterized by low income/education, reduced education, and employment opportunities. Difficulties commuting outside of peak hours due to lack of services and unsafe perceptions.
- Profile 4** Persons with no professional activity and no/low income, difficulties accessing and remaining in employment and education. Reduced training and employment opportunities.
- Profile 5** Parents with caring responsibilities and low financial means, Negative safety perceptions, reduced access to education and employment, and limited to lower paid or part-time work due to caring responsibilities.



2015 Public Transport Accessibility Levels in Wandsworth'

## The Wandsworth picture

Approximately half of the borough is well connected, however 2015 Public Transport Accessibility Levels (PTALs) place some of the more deprived areas of the borough including Roehampton, Furzedown and parts of West Hill entirely within in the least accessible half of PTAL categories. PTALs can have an impact access on employment options, essential goods (e.g., grocery options) and services, which can be deepened for those that can only travel via public transport. TFL fares are due to increase on 5th March 2023; Bus fares +10p to £1.75, daily cap on multiple bus trips +30p to £5.25, Underground services Zone 1-6 TfL cap for contactless £14.90 per day (+80p) and £74.50 per week (+£4). Almost 1 in 2 (48%) of Wandsworth residents do not have access to a car/van, which is lower than Inner London (58%) but higher than London (42%).

## Evidence

The Wandsworth Cost of Living Commission held an evidence gathering session in Tooting on the 27th April. This session focused on the Transport theme, and based on the terms of reference, considered the key issues of the Cost of Living crisis in relation to transport, including the cost of

transport, accessibility, alternative modes of transport and barriers to active transport including financial aspects.

## Key Issues

### Financial barriers to transport

On average people spend 13% of income on transport, and transport costs can differ significantly depending on where you live and how high the level of access to public transport is. Josh Cottell, from Think Tank Centre for London, highlighted that low-income Londoners are far less likely to own a car, and therefore depend on public transport where costs have been rising steadily since the cost of living crisis began. Cottell expanded by evidencing how financial barriers to transport due to the costs of public transport for low-income Londoners can significantly reduce their opportunities, such as for employment. Laura Elms, from electric bike company Human Forest, outlined the lower cost transport options such as shared bikes schemes and stated that their surveys show that over 60% of users use the service because it saves money.

### Physical barriers to transport

Evidence and data gathered by the Commission shows that Roehampton is one area where poor public transport and the Cost of Living crisis have interlinking impacts. Due to Roehampton's poor access to public transport, Celia Duncan, from Wandsworth Cycling campaign, commented that private car ownership is high in Roehampton which would increase their transport costs. Celia also outlined the upfront capital costs of purchasing and maintaining a bike, arguing that this amongst other transport options are clearly unaffordable to many low-income residents. Representatives from Wheels for Wellbeing, Transport for London, Sustrans, and Wandsworth Older Peoples Forum all gave evidence revealing the way that access to public transport is limited for disabled and elderly people, often meaning these groups are paying more to travel. The Youth Voice Representative on the Commission, Keziah Gordon, had gathered feedback from youth groups around transport, commenting that young people find both safety and cost-based barriers to cycling, issues with increasing cost of public transport (tubes specifically), and the reliability of buses.

### Health Issues

In addition to safety and cost-based issues, the Commission has also heard evidence on health issues associated with transport. Josh Cottell evidenced air pollution issues, stating that road vehicles are the biggest cause of air pollution, and which is shown to affect health and wellbeing of low-income families disproportionately. Health issues are a key driver of people's wellbeing, and their ability to get around and activity in the labour market.

## Transport Theme – Recommendations

### Short term

- Increase awareness of options available to low-income families & build cycle hubs that offer training and education
- Use schools as an entry point to encourage cycling – for example, through the promotion of Transport for London (TfL) stars scheme and expansion of funding streams for this, targeting of cycling training through outreach approaches where providers go to schools and more education for parents.
- Cycle share scheme subsidies for specific groups that Wandsworth and available data highlights as a target group, for example working with providers who are looking to provide in the borough to ensure prices are affordable.
- Explore the market for car clubs and share schemes as an option to both reduce the journeys via car and significantly reduce costs associated with car transport.
- Deliver targeted education and engagement with key groups around alternatives to car use including education, benefits, and travel planning (for example around how offsetting deliveries to other modes of transport can be helpful, around awareness of cost/time comparison of bikes vs car, and routes with lower traffic roads)
- Loans/schemes for buying bikes & micro mobility options, including cycle share schemes for targeted groups. This can build on the borough's try before you bike to include wider promotion, subsidy schemes for targeted groups based on best practice examples such as Hounslow's scheme (where Hounslow Council paid two months of bike rental via try before you bike for low-income target groups which proved a successful scheme encouraging prolonged uptake of cycling)
- Develop a lobby position that advocates for the collaboration and communication between services and industries within development policy, so that joint working can facilitate more focus/coordination around walking and cycling considerations in developments.

### Longer term

- Consider review of the tariffs for bike hangars compared to cars & investment into the delivery of more bike hangars in the borough
- Consider options for cargo bikes to become more widely available in the borough
- Prioritising space for sustainable travel
- Include disability consideration in all policy (within this, consider establishing a Disability Working Group who review and advise on the design and planning process of new infrastructure within the borough).
- Develop a lobby position on changes to discretionary fares, specifically looking at young people and those in education, and those receiving support such as free school meals.
- Develop lobby position on a freeze on public transport costs.



# 4 Summary of the solutions and emerging findings

## General

### Short term

#### Benefits support

- Examine options and approaches to promote benefit uptake, including developing and expanding the use of data from the LIFT project to implement targeted interventions.
- Develop a lobby and campaign position working with London Councils and the LGA exploring the benefits, potential impact, and legal and practical barriers to auto-enrolment of appropriate benefits.
- Support the LGA/London Councils lobby position to encourage DWP to improve the access to DWP data for targeted recipients.
- Increasing crisis support available to vulnerable residents
- Examine the value and opportunities for cash payments and cash first approaches.

#### Supporting the VCS - Strategic

- Approach the VCS and Citizens Advice Wandsworth as strategic partners
- Review council and partners' estates and buildings to identify potential community spaces that could be used to support VCS activity and interventions designed to mitigate the impact of the Cost of Living crisis.
- Encourage more data sharing and joint working between the council and the VCS (with two way information flows)
- Review the grants model for VCS to encourage more collaborative working

#### Income

- Review the implementation date for full living wage accreditation for all council outsourced services.

- Use council commitment to Real Living Wage (RLW) as a call to arms for all businesses and organisations in borough to take similar action now.
- Develop lobby positions: Trussell Trust and JRF Guarantee Essentials campaign, and Universal basic Income models.

#### Affordable Childcare

- Map the availability and affordability of childcare provision for working families in the borough.

#### Health impact of the CoL crisis

- Examine the development of Cost of Living support through Community Champions to provide awareness of support availability.
- Consider using community hubs as a focus for Cost of Living support
- Explore a range of support options with Health partners (for example, funding support for targeted families, social prescribing & social welfare models and Community wellbeing Hubs)

### Longer term

- Consider an approach to becoming a "Union Friendly" borough.
- Review benefits policy (UBI & Cash first)
- Build a framework for responding to the compound impact of cost of living crisis.

## Food

### Short term

- Develop a Food Strategy for Wandsworth which includes building community capacity, mapping food insecurity, exploration of new food supply options for focussed areas, support transition from food aid to food trade models, develop growing food projects
- Looking at the value of a Healthy hospitality catering and retail charter based on best practice examples such as the Greenwich model.
- Create Healthy Start Champions within the community to support take-up of healthy start vouchers.
- Develop mechanisms to increase take-up of food support, including Free School Meals and Healthy Start vouchers.
- Explore the development of Meals on Wheels and home delivery system for people struggling to make their own meals.
- Develop lobby positions on the role of big six retailers in Food inflation, Universal free school meals.

## Longer term

Research and develop an approach that targets the diverse needs of Wandsworth communities including the:

- Mapping of affordable food provision
- Holistic solutions to support those in food poverty who may be facing other challenges related to low-income, for examples affordable food projects linked to Credit Unions.
- Mechanisms to support transition from food aid to food trade.
- Procurement: supporting and nurturing local food businesses, based on best practice such as the Preston approach.

## Fuel

### Short term

- Education and knowledge sharing - Increase awareness of energy efficiency support, especially targeting fuel poor homes. This will include energy-saving advice and insulation schemes.
- Collaboration with private rented sector landlords to encourage take up of upgrading schemes and support investment into energy saving. This will involve communication with stakeholders in the Wandsworth private rental sector to increase knowledge and understanding of the support and schemes available for landlords to help installations and improvement. In addition, this will help the overall scheduling of upgrading the private rented sector housing stock, as new regulations are expected to be implemented in coming years.
- Incremental support with lower-cost equipment – as the fabric-first approach, which involves more structural works, can cost significant amounts requiring upfront capital investment, the Commission recommends a step-by-step approach that involves supporting the awareness and purchasing of lower-cost approaches such as:
  - 1 Behavioral change- boilers down to 60°, draw curtains at dusk.
  - 2 Below £100: Small measures- draught excluders, chimney balloons, door brushes
  - 3 Between £200-£600- Install smart thermostats, smart Thermostatic Radiator Valves, and loft insulation.
  - 4 £500 - Balance heating system/Powerflush

- Interventions to resolve damp/mould such as ventilation and air changes, installation of trickle vents and warm air vents, advice on drying clothes and other behaviours.
- Improve links to GP services (cold weather trigger) and social prescribing to support interventions.
- Encouraging residents to apply for all of the government grants that are available for property insulation upgrades.
- Review approach to warm spaces in preparation for Winter- take learnings from 2022/2023, consider use and purpose.

### Longer term

- Reviewing approach to energy efficiency
- Review best practice ideas:
  - Research and review options for bulk purchasing schemes. For example, looking into best practice such as the Leicestershire group buying for solar, reviewing buying clubs and looking at private sector purchasing power. The Commission will work with lead Commissioner, Toby Costin, to review options, including collective switches to green tariffs, collective LED purchases and collective draught excluder packs. There are many benefits to this approach including cheaper pricing can get those hesitant involved, raises the climate action profile and contributes to a sense of collective action and community spirit.
  - Research and review social tariffs approach to provide more targeted support which could be evidenced to be more progressive and more cost-effective in the longer term.
  - Look into Demand flexibility service, which has been developed to allow the ESO to access additional flexibility when national demand is at its highest.
  - Examine insurance policy approach which involves targeted awareness raising for those approaching retirement to do specific energy efficiency improvements to ensure lowers bills during retirement.
  - Consider approaches where landlords pay their fair share (using ETHER data/Wandsworth data sets)
  - Research and review approaches for low carbon neighbourhoods.
  - Consider the development of a quality mark from the council, having an awards system on energy efficiency.

## Housing

### Short term

- Develop lobby position: for a national landlord database and unlocking freeze on local housing allowance.
- Research further best practice around local landlord accreditation schemes and consider a framework for Wandsworth, in order to promote good practice in private rented sector. This should be done alongside awareness of the progress of national regulation changes associated with the Renters Reform Bill requirements for local authorities.

### Longer term

- Consider how the council could provide more support to clients who are not likely to obtain social housing due to long waiting times with other housing options such as mutual exchange and mobility schemes.
- Consider how the council could provide homelessness support to people who are experiencing severe hardship from exploitative landlords
- Commit to only placing homeless residents in temporary accommodation that is equipped with essential items (bed, fridge, cooker etc.) where needed.
- Consider and review options for low-cost housing solutions and availability of social housing and the use of community infrastructure levy funding.
- Exploring targeted housing models .
- Consider how the council could improve liaison with private sector landlords.

## Transport

### Short term

- Increase awareness of options available to low-income families & build cycle hubs that offer training and education.
- Use schools as an entry point to encourage cycling – for example, through the promotion of TFL stars scheme and expansion of funding streams for this, targeting of cycling training through outreach approaches where providers go to schools and more education for parents.
- Cycle share scheme subsidies for specific groups that available data highlights as a target group, for example working with providers who are looking to provide in the borough to ensure prices are affordable.

- Explore the market for car clubs and share schemes as an option to both reduce the journeys via car and significantly reduce costs associated with car transport.
- Deliver targeted education and engagement with key groups around alternatives to car use including education, benefits, and travel planning (for example around how offsetting deliveries to other modes of transport can be helpful, around awareness of cost/time comparison of bikes vs car, and routes with lower traffic roads)
- Loans/schemes for buying bikes & micro mobility options, including cycle share schemes for targeted groups. This can build on the borough's try before you bike to include wider promotion, subsidy schemes for targeted groups based on best practice examples such as Hounslow's scheme (where Hounslow Council paid two months of bike rental via try before you bike for low-income target groups which proved a successful scheme encouraging prolonged uptake of cycling)
- Develop a lobby position that advocates for the collaboration and communication between services and industries within development policy, so that joint working can facilitate more focus/coordination around walking and cycling considerations in developments

### Longer term

- Consider review of the tariffs for bike hangars compared to cars & investment into the delivery of more bike hangars in the borough.
- Consider options for cargo bikes to become more widely available in the borough.
- Prioritising space for sustainable travel
- Include disability consideration in all policy (within this, consider establishing a Disability Working Group who review and advise on the design and planning process of new infrastructure within the borough).
- Develop a lobby position on changes to discretionary fares, specifically looking at young people and those in education, and those receiving support such as free school meals.
- Develop lobby position on a freeze on public transport costs.

## 5 Next Steps



The focus for the remaining period of the Commission's work programme will be on further work to develop a robust evidence base of the impact and drivers of the Cost of Living crisis in Wandsworth. This will be then used to inform the development of a range of longer-term systemic solutions to the key issues identified by the Commission.

### Place Based Approach

The Commission will continue with the Place Based approach and the commitment to gather information and intelligence and use this to inform work with key shareholders, partners, and communities to jointly develop and identify potential solutions.

The final report and recommendations will use lived experience case studies and testament to evidence need and then determine practical solutions based on feedback from the community. The Commission will take a targeted approach to evidence gathering, mapping evidence against the key lines of enquiry for each theme, also ensuring that the lived experience voice has been effectively captured from Wandsworth communities.

The Place Based work will include a further three community-based evidence gathering sessions with invited witnesses from community organisations and relevant regional and national

organisations related to each theme. These will be held in Earlsfield, Balham and Putney from June to September 2022, and in addition the Commission plans to meet a further three times in the Town Hall to review evidence and question additional witnesses.

The Commission will also receive and review evidence from the focus groups with targeted cohorts from the community and meet directly with local organisations from the public sector (Health, Public Health, Regulatory services) voluntary and community sector including key advocacy organisations and the local and regional business community.

### Areas of Focus

In the work in the first six months the Commission has gathered a large amount of information relating to the Food theme, in the remaining half of the work programme there will be more focus on the other themes, Housing, Fuel and Transport.

The Commission will take a targeted approach evidence gathering, mapping evidence against the key lines of enquiry for each theme, also ensuring that the lived experience voice has been effectively captured for all Wandsworth communities.

The Commission will continue to work closely with the Wandsworth Council Cost of Living programme team and other local organisations supporting Wandsworth residents through the cost of living crisis, facilitating a two way flow of information for sharing ideas, insights, and best practice examples.

### Developing long term systemic solutions

The Commission will also look at the structures and linkages between the key organisations in Wandsworth, working with the main public, private and voluntary sector organisations. This intelligence and information will then be used to identify system changes that Wandsworth Council, its partners, the wider community, regional and national government could take to address the longer-term systemic issues and drivers of the cost of living crisis for local people.

Through this work the Commission will develop a process for identifying the steps and the elements of the change journey that will be required to achieve the long-term vision.

The Commission will continue to work closely with the Wandsworth Council Cost of Living programme team and other local organisations supporting Wandsworth residents through the cost of living crisis, facilitating a two way flow of information for sharing ideas, insights, and best practice examples.

## Validating the findings

The Commission will seek to work with the aforementioned range of organisations and people in Wandsworth and regionally to together to validate, develop and approve the final recommendations from the work of the Commission.

Through this process the Commission will be able to identify, what is in the gift and remit of the council and key partners, and where system change is required. Also, to consider and develop lobby and campaigning positions in areas of regional national policy, this will build on the close relationship the Commission has developed with organisations such as London Councils and the Local Government Association.

## Timeline

The Commission will aim to complete the work programme and produce a final report in the winter of 2023.