

THE STORY OF PETERBOROUGH'S POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION

JANUARY 2023 - JANUARY 2025

Hosted by



Funded by



Evaluated by



CONTENTS

Bringing Poverty Truth to Peterborough Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission timeline The Poverty Truth Commission approach Who made up the Poverty Truth Commission?	e5 6
What was learnt?	12
What was achieved?	16
Recommendations	21
Experience of Community Empowerers	23
The power of inclusion and and empowerment	23
Experience of the process	24
Empowerer view on impact of the Commission	33
What's next?	33
Experience of facilitators	35
Co-facilitation	36
The value of seeking out alternative voices	38
The complexity of facilitation	40
The role of the host organisation	43
Experience of civic commissioners	44
Why civic commissioners became involved	45
Expectations of the process	
Experience of the process	
Impact of the experience	
Appendix one - Evaluation Approach	52

Telling the story of the Poverty Truth Commission.....3

THE STORY OF THE PETERBOROUGH POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION

This evaluation is presented as the story of Peterborough's first Poverty Truth Commission, which took place across two years between January 2023 and 2025.

It is set out as a story, as this is a guiding principle of the work of Poverty Truth Commissions.



"Stories not Stats"

So many decisions about how to 'tackle poverty' are centered around numbers, and what the data tells us about the problem.

But understanding the data – focusing on what is wrong – is only part of the picture. Stats have their place to provide context, insight, and maybe even a starting point.

To create real change we need deeper understanding of what it's like to be one of those stats. We must create ways for people to safely share their experiences and contribute to the solutions.

Peterborough's first Poverty Truth Commission created space for people to share their stories – not to shock or to shame. But to empower, to use them to guide decisions and solutions.

And so, it is right that this evaluation focuses on telling the story of the Poverty Truth Commission.

What happened - What was learned - What the next chapter might be

Whilst this story doesn't provide a deep analysis of the systems in Peterborough that affect poverty, and how we have changed them. It does provide insight into what can be done to build on the important first steps to creating that shared understanding and action.

BRINGING POVERTY TRUTH

TO PETERBOROUGH

Most stories about poverty in Peterborough start with the stats. Which are well known. And largely unchanging.

So, this story starts with hope stemming from crisis.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, PCVS as a representative of the community and charity sector in Peterborough wanted to build on the momentum of connection, and collaboration that was a feature of the city's responses to Covid.

During crisis, people and organisations across all sectors had come together to respond and to make sure those most vulnerable to Covid-19, or worst affected by the lockdowns and broader economic impact of pandemic were supported. There was a levelling of hierarchy and a removal of barriers to collaboration – the focus was on solutions and working together to genuinely help.

Of course, the Poverty Truth Commission isn't about responding to crisis. But it builds on those principles of equality, sharing and collaboration to create solutions. And it recognises that if we want to genuinely strengthen our city, we need to work differently to address the complex issue of poverty. To normalise the sharing of experiences and putting people at the heart of decisions that affect them.

This first commission was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and hosted by PCVS as a key organisation connecting communities, the organisations that serve them, and statutory services.

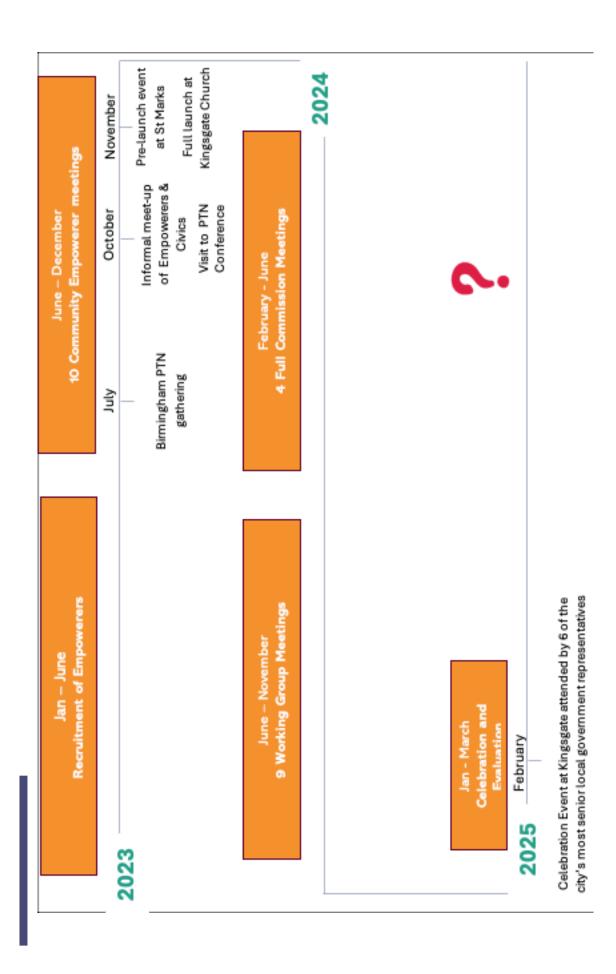
At this stage, there is broad commitment in the city to working in partnership with people with lived experience and the organisations that work most closely with them. And opportunity through Peterborough City Council's emerging Poverty Agenda.

But how this partnership happens, whether it is meaningful and genuinely healing, and builds on the learning from the Poverty Truth Commission is yet to be discussed.

The recommendations outline some key actions which could be taken.

PETERBOROUGH POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION

TIMELINE



THE POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION APPROACH

The Poverty Truth Commission is built on the principle:



"Nothing about us, without us, is for us."

Whilst there are some key foundational approaches and processes, alongside support and guidance from the Poverty Truth Network, each Commission is different – because each commission happens in different places, with different people.

Who is involved



Facilitator(s)

Employed by a host organisation which facilitates the process.



Community Empowerers

People who have experienced, or are experiencing poverty and want to share their experience to create change for others.



Civic Commissioners

People who are responsible for resources, policies and decisions which affect the opportunities of people's experience of poverty.

THE POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION APPROACH

The Phases



Phase one: Recruitment and Relationship Building

Employed by a host organisation which facilitates the process.



Phase two: Full Commission

People who have experienced, or are experiencing poverty and want to share their experience to create change for others.



Phase three: Working Groups

People who are responsible for resources, policies and decisions which affect the opportunities of people's experience of poverty.

The Principles



Nothing about us, without us, is for us



Building powerful relationships between all members of the commission



Humanising people and systems



POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION



The Facilitators

The Commission employed two Facilitators. Sometimes, only one is employed. But there was real value in this approach – bringing together different experiences and approaches.

"James and Cheryl are complete opposites but work well together.... as a partnership they bounce off each other." Community Empowerer

Cheryl

Cheryl has had a career in the Public Sector, and has excellent relationships with many of the Civics, and a really sound understanding of the systems which can influence experience of poverty.

• What I would like people to know about me:

That they can talk to me confidentially and that I will help / support where I can. Iona said she approached me because she liked my personality and I was warm. This is the biggest compliment to me.

• Why I got involved in the PTC

I was intrigued by what a PTC meant. That was also hosted in an organisation that has the same values as me. I wanted in my 60s to go back to my roots.

• What I'm most proud of

Opening my mind to embrace different ways of working. Using my skills / experience in a valuable project putting people with lived experience first.

James

James' background crosses research and working in community settings supporting people, with a deep understanding of the experiences of people living with poverty. This combination has been a real strength in the process.

• What I would like people to know about me

I feel things very deeply, they sink right in

Why I got involved in the PTC

I had lived experience - and I also needed a job

• What I'm most proud of

Seeing the change in the community commission. Also of myself. I wasn't convinced I could do it until I did.





THE COMMUNITY EMPOWERERS



Between January and May 2023 James and Cheryl spoke with over 350 people they met at community events, and in community spaces.

In the early stages 16 people were involved, and some have had contact to the end. They are part of a broader network in the city who are interested in this work.

But there was a core group of 8 Empowerers who were actively involved throughout.

Beckii, Iona, Rosemary, Roy, Sara, Sadie, Sandra, and Omar.

Some of the Empowerers shared why they got involved:

Sara

What I would like people to know about me:

I have more confidence and empowered / inspired to influence change locally and nationally

Why I got involved in the PTC

Wanted to make change

What I'm most proud of:

My aspirations for change have grown

Iona

What I would like people to know about me:

I like meeting individuals from different backgrounds, nationality, and age groups. We can all learn from each other.

Why I got involved in the PTC

Meeting Cheryl and James two very supportive, caring kind individuals

What I'm most proud of:

Seeing how we have grown together. We have laughed and cried. Also got involved with different professionals in Peterborough / Cambridgeshire.

Sadie

What I would like people to know about me:

Despite my mental health challenges I do a lot in the community e.g. walking groups and dementia walks.

Why I got involved in the PTC

Show my mental health to hidden disability. Show disability is not outside.

What I'm most proud of:

To show I am not alone with my mental health / self harming



THE CIVIC COMMISSIONERS



During the initial recruitment phase, Senior Leaders were contacted across key organisations in the city – Combined Authority, Peterborough City Council, NHS, DWP, Housing, and Further Education, and the charities and faith organisations which serve our communities.

Through the process, 23 Civic Commissioners, representing 13 organisations attended meetings across the Full Commission and Working Groups.

However, 12 Civics from 8 organisations engaged through the process – attending more than 40% of the meetings.

There were four people who engaged most fully:

Maria Finch, NWAFT Head of Patient Experience

Danielle Black, NWAFT Programme Manager (Integrated Neighbourhoods)

Matt Oliver, Peterborough City Council, Head of Stronger Communities

Michelle Dalliston, St Johns Church, Vicar

Whilst the purpose of the PTC is to equalise and connect as humans, not titles, who is involved from Civic Organisations will impact what can be achieved through the Working Groups, and the broader potential to influence change in the city.

Overleaf is a summary of the level of representation across organisations, and levels of representation.



THE CIVIC COMMISSIONERS

Taking place across 2 years means that changes in political and organisational structures can influence involvement across the whole commission.

For example, the Leader of the Council, Mohammed Farooq was initially involved, and shared his story. However, he resigned as leader of the Council in May 2024, and stepped back.

"He came to the meeting in the Church and shared his story. He understood because he didn't start off in the best of places."

Community Empowerer reflecting on how Civics were involved

Additionally, Andy Coles, former Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Governance until November 2023, was involved throughout the process, but from May 2024 he was no longer a Councilor.

These changes are expected but highlight the importance of ensuring broader organisational commitment to sustain work.

Local Authority

Peterborough City Council – the Leader, a Cabinet Member, Service Director, Head of Service and various Housing Team officers.

Education

Inspire Education Group (further education provider)

CEO and Vice Principal

Charity and Faith Organisations

CEOs of charities representing education, community, housing, and domestic abuse.

(CP Learning Trust, PCVS, Peterborough Women's Aid, Light Project Peterborough, St John's Church)

Health

NHS

NWAFT (NHS Trust responsible for hospitals and community services) – Head of Patient Experience and Programme Manager for Integrated Neighbourhoods

Healthwatch (The independent body responsible for listening to, and understanding the needs of people who use NHS and Social Care.) - Head of Engagement and Senior Engagement Officer

DWP

Senior Manager

Social Business

Central Co-Op Member and Community Relations Officer



This story of the Poverty Truth Commission is full of rich learning and insight about the value of this approach, the impact it had, and how it can be built upon. It is valuable to anyone who wants to use participatory approaches in a way that genuinely empowers.

But there is some key learning that could make a difference to Peterborough's approach to tackling poverty and inform the next steps.

"Many of the current service delivery models are not inclusive and don't take in to account the impact of poverty on people's ability to access services that they need and are entitled to."

Civic Commissioner, reflecting on what they'd learned

The most significant learning about the experience of people in Peterborough living in poverty is that services designed to help people experiencing poverty are often inaccessible and exclude people.

Either by design due to disconnected services and policies, and digital exclusion. Or oversight due to pre-conceptions about who experiences poverty, and what their needs are.

And what was learned was the importance, value and potential of creating and strengthening connection to address this.

The connections across different people's experiences of poverty

The connections across services and agendas to create better responses.

The connections between people which make change possible.

Understanding what connects people's experiences of poverty as a starting point

The Community Empowerers represented people who have protected characteristics across disability, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and <u>sexual</u> orientation.

And yet there were many aspects of their experience that were common. The difficulties in navigating complicated services and processes acting to disempower and exclude. And the impact of poverty on isolation and poor mental health.

By focusing on the commonality, it was possible to identify a clear area for action – digital inclusion.

This won't be a panacea, and there will always been a need to consider intersectionality. But starting to address the more universal barriers will have an impact across all people who are more likely to experience poverty. And will ensure that those who don't access dedicated services because of a protected characteristic are not excluded from the process. Because, whilst poverty is more likely for some groups, anyone can experience poverty.

And people experiencing poverty can quickly identify the shared challenges. In the early stages of the process digital inclusion was discussed by the Community Empowerers

"Right at the beginning we said we needed a one stop shop and to address digital exclusion. We said it on 11/10/2023. We need all services into one place."

Community Empowerer

Making connections across agendas

The Poverty Truth Commission took a citywide approach to bring together residents, service providers, and decision makers without a pre-set agenda beyond understanding poverty.

Often when participatory work happens it relates to a specific service or issue which can be affected or influenced by poverty – health, homelessness, or place. This can miss opportunities for broader improvements, co-ordinated action, and better use of investment in services and solutions.

By bringing people together around the broader topic of poverty, the Poverty Truth Commission found the common barrier of digital inclusion across the three areas of education, health, and housing.

This meant that the individual organisations could consider their own processes and policies, and have taken action - NWAFT, Peterborough City Council Housing Team and DWP. But it also identified an opportunity for more unified action through Connecting Cambridgeshire investment into the city.

Taking a step back, and understanding the work that others are doing, and the opportunities to connect on specific issues strengthens the opportunity for improvement in services.

This is particularly important because the solutions might already be there – or happening. It isn't always about creating new services (although this sometimes might be needed), but about how existing services can work better, together.

Additionally, participation in the PTC needs broader buy in from organisations, so that there is opportunity for individual commissioners to feedback and influence other agendas, strategies and processes in their organisations. This is much harder work.

Finally, the Civic Commissioners highlighted the challenge of balancing where they spend their time, particularly when influencing for change is already part of their day to day work.

"I had to prioritise where I spend my time. I supported PTC by providing space for Facilitators to meet people. It is important work.

I would have liked to be more directly involved, but I am working on a number of agendas which are all connected to poverty.

PTC needs to connect to those too."

Making connections across agendas

The Poverty Truth Commission took place over two years.

The early stages of connecting with Community Empowerers and building trusting relationships between them as a group took one year.

This work is slow, particularly because many people do not trust those who provide services due to their individual experiences, and because the experience and impact of poverty is often ongoing:

"You can't separate the experience of poverty that is often ongoing. This is deeply personal for people. If you're asking for them to give so much, they need to be supported to make that possible." James, PTC Facilitator

But the time invested in building trust, and then nurturing relationships between Community Empowerers and Civic Commissioners meant that more open, and meaningful conversations could happen.

"It was an in-road with a group of people I wouldn't have been able to hear from otherwise. We don't have capacity and money to set up consultation with everyone. Providing the platform through PTC was a fantastic opportunity to go out and hear hidden voices" Maria, Civic Commissioner

For Civic Commissioners it challenged perceptions, helped people understand that poverty creates barriers to accessing services, and reminded people of why the work happens. It improved their approach to developing and delivering services to genuinely address the cause and impact of poverty.

And for Community Empowerers it connected them with hope, and ambition to create change for themselves, and for others.

This work is valuable because it leads to deeper understanding that empowers both individuals experiencing poverty, and those who make decisions to create change through their everyday actions. The ripple effect of this work is the real value.

But it is also work that needs to continue to be done with intention. The experience of the Working Groups for Community Empowerers

WHAT WAS ACHIEVED?

The primary purpose of a Poverty Truth Commission is to test the question:



"What if people who struggled against poverty were involved in making decisions about tackling poverty?"

And this will be different in each place a Commission happens. Because poverty is complicated and the experience is shaped by what it is like to live in the city – what housing is like, employment and education opportunities, how the Local Authority works, what health services are like, what community spaces are available, access to public transport, and what charities exist.

So, the Poverty Truth Commission is in itself an opportunity to learn, to understand what can be changed, and to consider how this approach can help Peterborough address poverty.

It is not intended to end poverty in Peterborough. It would be unrealistic to expect it to fundamentally change the approach of partners, at every level. But this was the first time the approach of removing agendas to create connection, shared understanding and action across 'systems' (health, housing, education, charities) has been tried in the city.

And it was successful in creating change, and showing there is value in this approach:



Empowering people who experience poverty to be part of the conversations. Changing processes and services that make accessing support difficult.





Changing the approach of people in key influencing roles. Creating the foundations for a model of genuine systems change



WHAT WAS ACHIEVED:

Empowering people with experience of poverty

"Nothing about us, without us, is for us" is the central principle of the Poverty Truth Commission.

And it is clear that for the Community Empowerers this principle was upheld, and they had the opportunity to create change.

"It has given a voice to those silenced by experience" Community Empowerer

Empowerers were asked about their experience of the process, against a number of measures for successful co-production[1]. The PTC went beyond co-production, but the measures are still a useful proxy.



"I feel more confident"

100% strongly agreed

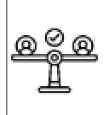
2 shared that their confidence was off any scale we could provide.

"What I brought to the process was valued equally to what other brought"

50% strongly agreed

50% agreed





"Everyone was equal in the process"

50% strongly agreed

25% agreed

25% agreed at point in the process

And most of them want to continue with this work, because they have gained as much as they had put into the process.

Being involved in the process genuinely improved the lives of many of the Empowerers.

Two are now in employment, and doing jobs that they enjoy and improve their quality of life:

"The experience of being with PCVS helped me get a job."

Others reported the impact on their mental health:

"It helped with my mental health."

"Helping people. Helping others live. Put my own illness aside"

These changes will have a lasting impact.

"My aspirations for change have grown."

"I built friendships, and it made my life better. We will keep in touch."

The approach taken in Poverty Truth Commission – genuine partnership with people affected by poverty – has the potential to improve responses to poverty, but also to improve lives of those involved, and their capacity to take action.



WHAT WAS ACHIEVED:

Changing the approach of people who provide services and make decisions.

Over the course of the Poverty Truth Commission there were 23 people representing 12 organisations involved. 5 of these were consistently involved throughout the two year process. This is significant, as there can be changes in priorities, funding, and staffing.

Many of those involved were in roles which focus on participation, inclusion, and inequalities – those who are more naturally supportive of this work. But even for these individuals, the process had an impact on their approach and attitudes:

"I hadn't really thought about how poverty affected people before, and how it stops them accessing services. But I do now, and I talk about it to others in my organisation."

"I have a clearer understanding on just how much of an impact poverty has on people lives, not just homelessness but everywhere in-between too. Many of the current service delivery models are not inclusive and don't take in to account the impact of poverty on people's ability to access services that they need and are entitled to."

A Civic Commissioners were also asked about the measures of co-production.



Two thirds of Civic Commissioners reported a greater understanding of the people affected by their decisions



Half of Civics reported a having more trust in the people affected by their decisions

And there was a ripple effect beyond the decisions made in the Working Groups.

- The Community Empowerers were invited to participate in a Strategy Day on improving patient experience at NWAFT.
- Broader decisions about changes to Housing Services were informed by the experience of Civic Commissioners in the process.
- Civic Commissioners are using their experience of the process, and their learning to influence how people are involved in making decisions within their organisations.

WHAT WAS ACHIEVED:

Creating the foundations for a model of genuine systems change.

Poverty is a systemic issue[1], because the cause and effects of poverty are complicated, and interconnected. It isn't possible to take one action to prevent poverty in the city. Any approach to tackling poverty needs to build understanding of how different systems, services, and environments in the city contribute to poverty, and prevent change for individuals and communities.

The Waters of Systems Change is a framework for understanding the different aspects of change that need to be co-ordinated and understood for broader systemic change to happen.

It identifies six conditions of change required across three levels:

- Structural change (explicit): Policies, practices and resource flows
- Relational change (semi-explicit): Relationships and connections and power dynamics
- Transformative change (implicit): mental models

The diagram below sets out the changes PTC achieved across all conditions

Policy

Direct contact number for people applying for housing support

Practice

Providing in person support for people to complete digital forms

Resource Flows

Directing investment in digital inclusion to the organisations who can have greatest impact

Relationships and Connections

Creating relationships across services and systems

Power dynamics

Creating equality through the process for genuine collaboration to happen

Mental Models

Changing perceptions of poverty, and of people who make decisions

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations set out below are from the evaluator, based on the broader context of what is happening in the city. They are made to the people who formed the first Poverty Truth Commission, and to anyone involved in making decisions or setting strategy which will affect Peterborough's approach to strategy.



Recommendation one: Reconvene and review.

There were clear actions taken by the Working Groups, but no opportunity to reconvene, reflect, and identify potential next steps together.

I recommend a final meeting of the Commission to review the actions that were taken, what work can be sustained, and how you might retain the connections and momentum created.

The Poverty Truth Commission was about collective action – but the individuals involved still have capacity and opportunity to continue this work within their organisations, and involvement in other actions in the city.



Recommendation two: Make connections.

There are currently a number of emerging plans, strategies and investment in the city. Many of these could have a direct impact on the cause and experience of poverty. These include:

- Peterborough City Council's Poverty Strategy
- The Youth Guarantee
- Sport England's investment to improve lives through activity[1]
- Connecting Cambridgeshire's investment in digital inclusion

Connecting these agendas and plans will strengthen Peterborough's opportunity to address poverty through tangible action.

Beyond this there is existing work and previous work that can be drawn on. The work of Peterborough Presents, PCVS' Forums, Integrated Neighbourhood Teams and the learning from Think Communities.

[1] Sport England Invests in Local Communities - Living Sport

The principles of the Poverty Truth Commission are already in action in many parts of the city. Understanding this work and making connections will strengthen each part, and the city's collective response.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendation three: Create a Commitment to Partnership and Participatory approaches for the city.

Building on the connections identified above, consider creating a commitment to partnership to empower Peterborough's citizens, and improve lives. This was the principle of the Think Communities agenda. Leadership in this way creates opportunities for organisations and people to convene, and take the connected and collective action required to change systems.



Recommendation four: Consider what a second Poverty Truth Commission might add

The first Poverty Truth Commission demonstrated the value of this way of working – of building trust, creating space for equal contribution and creating connection.

It was about learning and testing, and understanding how it might work in Peterborough.

But the trust that made it successful is only maintained when the ways of working are committed to, action is followed through, and there is ongoing dialogue.

As such, a second Poverty Truth Commission should be clear on:

- Where it fits in with the broader agenda to address poverty in the city, and how it will feed into it.
- How capacity is being created to do this work.
- The commitment to the ways of working from those in the Commission, and broader partners who have influence.

Poverty means not being able to heat your home, pay your rent or buy essentials for your children. It means waking up everyday facing insecurity, uncertainty and impossible decisions about money

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERERS

This section sets out the experience of the Community Empowerers, and what the impact of involvement has been for them.

It builds an understanding of the benefits of the approach, what is important, and how to more effectively involve people in decisions which affect theM

The power of inclusion and empowerment

Impact on individuals

All of the Empowerers describe the significant impact being involved in the Poverty Truth Commission had on them. The sense of pride and empowerment is palpable, particularly when you meet them as a group.

The value of involving people with lived experience in decisions and actions goes beyond better decisions – it improves the lives of those who are involved in the process.

All Empowerers shared that their confidence had improved, with two saying it was off any scale I could provide.

All talked about friendships they had formed, and how important these were.

"Now I've got a circle of friends."

"I built friendships, and it made my life better. We will keep in touch"

Two of the Empowerers who had been unemployed for a number of years now have jobs.

"The experience of being with PCVS helped me get a job. " And all said they had gained as much from the process as they had given.

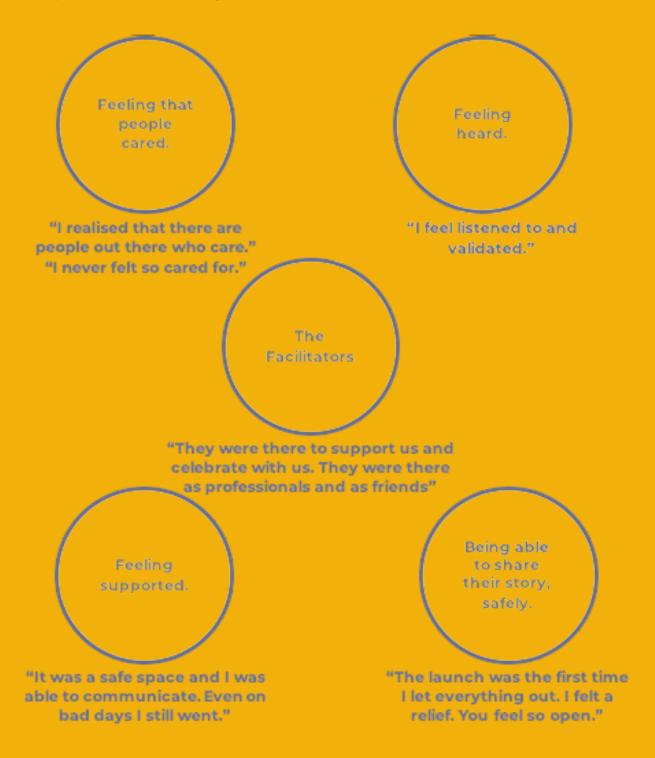
"It was good for my mental health."

And one is volunteering more, which has a significantly positive impact on her mental health.

"Helping people. Helping others live. Put my own illness aside"

WHAT MADE THIS CHANGE POSSIBLE?

The Empowerers are really clear about this:



Sara's story

Sara is a walking talking advertisement for the power of inclusion and empowerment in the Poverty Truth Commission process.

James met Sara at the St Johns Church community café where she was volunteering. She hadn't been employed for a number of years, and had experienced poor mental health, and challenges with housing.

Sara quickly decided to get involved with the Poverty Truth Commission, to share her experiences.

"I wanted to make change."

And through the process her confidence to make change has grown. She is now the Charity Representative for the Poverty Truth Network, and has spoken on the radio about the work of the Commission, as well as making a speech at the Celebration Event.

Sara has realised what is possible, and is committed to keeping on working to create change.

"My aspirations for change have grown."

The wider impact of being involved for Sara has been significant. She became involved in Church Choir, and the Church Council. From there she organised events.

And Sara got a job helping people with similar experiences to her. But when she found it affecting her health because of the amount of screentime, she advocated for herself and sought help. When she left the job, it didn't set her back – she found a new job working at Peterborough Cathedral which she loves – she spends time with people. And she's developing her own business – creating and selling foil art.

As a fellow Empowerer described:

"You've gone from shrinking violet to blooming sunflower".

WHAT MADE THIS CHANGE POSSIBLE?

Empowerer experience: Recruitment January – June 2023

"We weren't recruited, we just popped along."

The people who became the Community Empowerers became involved through their direct contact with James and Cheryl.

Because the work of the PTC is about building trust, James and Cheryl took the time to be at community events, and in community spaces, to become known, and to build relationships.

This relational approach paid off.

"I met Cheryl at the dog show. We had seen each other around and started chatting. I liked Cheryl. I had a connection."

For others, it was more fortuitous that they became involved. Friends, Sadie and Sandra went along to the first meeting thinking is was an NHS feedback session.

"We thought it was an NHS feedback session. Then James started talking about the PTC and we stayed and got involved."

And some had known James through his volunteer work:

"I knew James from when he volunteered at Paston Farm during covid. He brought Cheryl along to see Paston. He said he thought I'd be interested, and I got involved."

Whilst others met the Facilitators in the spaces they went to for support.

"I was going to Garden House for food and support. Cheryl and James came along, and I got involved. Because of where I was in my life it was something to go to and to have purpose."

And for Sara, it was her who offered James support:

"I went along to a community hub and Sara was volunteering there. She looked at me and thought 'I need to get him a meal.' "

EMPOWERER EXPERIENCE: BUILDING TRUST AS EMPOWERERS JUNE – NOVEMBER 2023

"We built a bond quickly as people. We were all there for the same thing."

Between May and November the Empowerers met together 10 times. These meetings were focused on building relationships, getting to know each other, and establishing what was important for the group.

They were also really important in preparing Community Empowerers for involvement in the Full Commission. Ensuring that they were able to share their stories in empowering ways, understood their individual and collective strengths, and were ready to take leadership in the process.

Empowerers spoke really positively about these initial months of coming together.

"It was nerve wracking at the start. To let myself be vulnerable to other people. But we had respect for each other, and respected the fact that what was shared stayed in the room. I felt more connected with some people than others. Which you expect."

"We had discussed how we wanted it to be. No lanyards – not feeling watched or judged. We were there to be people."

Empowerer experience: The Launches - November 2023

There were two launch events for the PTC. One at St Marks Church which was attended by friends and family, and people from organisations the Empowerers trusted. This was an opportunity to see the film for the first time in a public place. This gave them an opportunity to feel vulnerable amongst people they trusted.

The 2nd "official" launch was attended by 'big wigs' at Kingsgate Church. These events were an opportunity to communicate more broadly about the intentions of the PTC, and to introduce the Empowerers.

The decision to have a pre-launch at St Marks was an important one, that increased confidence of Empowerers to share their stories.

Two of the Empowerers who had chosen for someone else to read their stories or poetry at St Marks stood up and shared their own stories at Kingsgate.

"At the launch James was going to read my poem like he did at St Marks. But at the last minute I made eye contact with him to say 'I'll do it.' It's the first time I've performed my poetry publicly."

EMPOWERER EXPERIENCE: FULL COMMISSION: FEBRUARY – MAY 2024

"The civics are human beings"

In October 2023 there was an informal gathering of Empowerers and Civics at Willow Café in Central Park. This was an opportunity for people to meet, and get to know each other before the full commission.

The first full commission happened in February 2024.

The focus of the session was on getting to know each other, with activities designed to help this "pipe cleaners and clay". Community Empowerers describe that there was a real sense of equality in the room.

Several of the Empowerers commented on the impact the session had on a Senior figure in the Council. This made them realise that there was more in common than there was difference. The sense of being 'on the same level' was really significant to how people were able to take part.

"When we had the first full commissioners meeting we were at the new PCVS office and the were a lot of people in a small room. I had a panic attack and everyone was really patient and gave me space. But they included me. Not just the Empowerers. The big wigs were caring as well which was nice. Sometimes with big wigs you get the feeling they think they're better than you. But they didn't. We were on the same level."

And this work to build trust paid off. One Empowerer described the experience of Full Commission meetings

"Not like when you have an Ofsted inspection at school and people are on show. We were all just people of Peterborough. With James and Cheryl protection us. We could communicate with out backlash."

But for others there was a sense of frustration at the pace of change

"In February 24 I felt frustrated and wanted to get to the nitty gritty. It went too far the other way and I was frustrated. I was fired up from day one. I can see now it was important."

And through this process, Empowerers who had established friendships had conversations about the experience:

"We met outside the session, individually for a coffee to talk about what we wanted to achieve and what was already happening."

EMPOWERER EXPERIENCE: WORKING GROUPS JUNE 2024-JANUARY 2025

"The working groups was when it broke down for me."

In June 2024 three working groups were set up to focus on specific themes that had emerged through the Full Commissions – Health, Housing, Education.

The transition to Working Groups was not a positive one for many of the Empowerers. There were several common themes about what led to a poor experience for some Empowerers.

The process for deciding what the groups would be wasn't clear

"There wasn't enough brainstorming to get to the topics (was so big)"

"I was confused about when and what the groups were for"

"The Working Groups weren't relevant to me. But they were the right groups. Most struggles came under those three groups."

It was unclear how to be involved, or what choice they had in attending other working groups

"I didn't know what the other groups were and felt forced in."

"The education group was the one I wanted to go on, but didn't hear about"

The equality that had been a feature of the Full Commission felt absent

"Topics were top down and not bottom up. And not what should have come. I felt the decision was made without us."

"Civics sometimes shot down a conversation or area of work without discussion"

"It didn't feel equal anymore"

There was a lack of consistency in Civics attending, with people who hadn't been part of the full process attending.

"There was a change of civics which made it inconsistent. We needed to prepare them."

"Civics have to commit and can't send a deputy."

"Some didn't stay on board. I get people are busy but it just made me think "more people making promises and not keeping them." If you're going to commit and make promises, keep them. We committed to each other."

And the ways of working that had been important through the process stopped.

"We stopped doing check ins"

This wasn't a universal experience though. The Empowerers who formed direct relationships with Civics had a more positive experience of the process. As well as those who had a direct connection to what was changed.

For several of the Empowerers they felt the topics were beyond the authority and influence of the Working Groups. Things that were set by national government, like education:

"For education it is the government that needs to change their act, not locally." Building understanding of what local change can happen is important, understanding what the barriers to change might be, but focusing on what can be done locally.

And things that were too complex to be resolved with simple fixes:

"I do think that some of the thinking about what to change was too big a fix. Or not for everyone. Getting internet available is ok, but some people can't use a laptop or a website or don't have a phone. In theory you can go to the library for help. If they can fix it then great. But in my opinion it was too big. "

This reminds us that poverty isn't about simple fixes, and why the importance of people who have experienced poverty is so important. Because they'll understand what might still prevent people from having access to services and opportunities.



EMPOWERER EXPERIENCE: SHARING STORIES

"It has allowed me to tell my story. To get stuff off my chest without being judged."

During the Poverty Truth Commission process people are encouraged to share their experiences of poverty, to help build shared understanding, and create consensus on what can be done.

But the process of sharing can be harmful for people, if done in a way that doesn't empower, and simply takes the story.

The Poverty Truth Commission didn't work in that way. For the Empowerers, they were empowered to share their stories, in ways that worked for them.

Films

The decision to use film to communicate stories was a collective one, when Empowerers shared that they didn't feel confident or comfortable speaking in front of a large audience.

And Empowerers enjoyed this process:

"It was easier making the film than standing up and telling my story."

"The films were good. I am not a performer but it was good to do new things. Kip and Julian really made you at ease. You couldn't have picked better people. They made us feel comfortable."

"We got our message across in the first one. It was powerful and caught the commissioners' attention. It opened their eyes."

However, the process of watching the films was not as easy for some of the Empowerers.

"I had been fine making the film. But being in a room full of people watching me was difficult. But it is important to share stories. If you don't share, people don't understand."

EMPOWERER EXPERIENCE: SHARING STORIES

There is an important consideration here, on the role of the film makers in making decisions about what is included. There was one aspect of someone's story that they found particularly difficult, even over a year later. The film maker's view was that it needed to be included, to engage people.

In the future, consideration could be given to using the Empowerment Triangle[1] as a guide to story sharing. Making sure that people who are sharing their story are doing so in a way that enables them to share the problem without creating further harm.

Poetry and art

Two of the Empowerers created poetry to share their experiences. And one created a picture.

These were performed at the Launch Events, as a way to connect a broader audience with the work of the Poverty Truth Commission.

[1] Why stories of trauma don't create change | Nathalie McDermott | TEDxLondon, January 2025

https://youtu.be/qa4UR_ANj-A?si=Nt8CcTG9gQ1wAEal



The Eerie Silence of Nature

Planes flying overhead, Cars travelling in the distance. Mist falling onto the street. Not a single chirp or call from the birds, No sight of rabbits, foxes or bears. The wind still, the trees bare. Leaves crunch while twigs snap Beneath the feet of a lone passer by. The street darkens as the mist thickens, No sign of the sun. Just the darkness and the silence of nature. Colours gone, Life is dull. Mother Nature visits no more. Decay spreads, No land or water spared.

Pets are a thing of the past,
Zoos are now museums.
Jungles nothing but stumps
And oceans still like death.
Oxygen is pricey,
There are no more poor.

Beckii Elizabeth Richardson

The Truth About Poverty

What is the truth about poverty? It's an empty fridge A hungry belly A button phone An ancient telly An account in the red An unpaid bill Three layers of socks And a no-heating chill A walk in the rain A bus that never came An empty seat in a class A fail not a pass A condition untreated An uncomprehending stare A tooth left unpulled A State that doesn't care It's a person sitting Alone in a room With no hope to lift them Only doom and gloom That's the truth about poverty Staring you in the eye So who can make changes? Only you and I.

Sandra Mcall

Commission



EMPOWERER VIEW ON IMPACT OF THE COMMISSION

Overall the Empowerers considered the impact the Poverty Truth Commission has had as positive, and had created change locally:

"We have had impact. Organisations are trying to change how they work"

"We opened people's eyes"

"It has given a voice to those silenced by experience"

For some, they had expected that change would only be tangible, like changes to services and policies. But through the process they understand that the change has to happen with individuals first, and the importance of the relational work. This is what PTC's are all about, but until it is experienced, it can be difficult to fully understand.

"I didn't realise those were the things we were changing. I thought it was the tangible."

"We can see now that things were happening"

What next?

Whilst the Celebration Event has happened, the Empowerers are keen that there is a final meeting of the full commission. The last meeting was a Working Group meeting.

"We want a final meeting with civics and PCVS."

What is poverty?





And they recognise that there is still work to be done, that they identified early on:

"We need to identify what is there already."

"I think there is still more stuff we can do. Making sure people are aware of what is available."

"People moving to Universal Credit dread it. If we had more information it would be less stressful. A breakdown of 'this is what is going to happen.' I'm dreading move to Universal Credit. I have no worker to say "Hey I'm worried" to, so I'm going to have to wing it and wait."

All of the Empowerers are keen to see what will happen next in the city.

"I hope there is another chance to do this. To hear other people's stories and keep making a change."

Many would be keen to be involved.

"I'd do it again".

And they have a clear message for future Empowerers:

"Be open and don't be ashamed or embarrassed of situations. We can't move forward and change our city, we need to keep hounding the council. We need other people to speak up.

They will support you and you'll make friends. People from different backgrounds, with different issues come together as a community, building each other up."

EXPERIENCE OF FACILITATORS

EMPOWERER EXPERIENCE: RECRUITMENT JANUARY – JUNE 2023

The experience of the Facilitators was influenced by a number of things:

- This was the first Commission in the city
- It was the first Commission hosted by PCVS
- Their individual backgrounds, skills, and experiences

This section focuses on the shared reflections of the Facilitators about what worked, what was learned, and what they would recommend future Facilitators, and host organisations consider.

The key learning about the role of Facilitators both Cheryl and James highlighted is:

There is real benefit in having co-facilitators. This was a key contributor to the success of the commission.

The role of facilitator is complex – managing relationships, tensions, and holding people through the process.

There is real value in finding people who wouldn't usually be represented in traditional consultations.

You need to work proactively to ensure the process is genuinely accessible and inclusive. This is an ongoing process.



Co-facilitation

The benefits of having co-facilitators

"The dyad of the two facilitators is so important. We can sense check. We have different skills set.

In many places there is one Facilitator running a Poverty Truth Commission. There were many benefits to this being a shared role, as set out below.

1. The breadth of skills and experiences

"Our strength was our different perspectives."

James' strength is talking to people. Cheryl's background is dealing with complexity for people.

James is excellent at reflective practice. Cheryl is really strong at process.

James had excellent knowledge and connection to community places in Peterborough. Cheryl had deep understanding and relationships with statutory and civic partners.

2. Supporting the Relational Approach

The focus of the Poverty Truth Commission was building strong, trusting relationships.

Having two Facilitators strengthened this. Where Empowerers and Civics may not have had a strong connection with one of the Facilitators, they often did with the other.

It was beneficial when there were difficult relationships, or situations to manage – being able to work together to resolve problems and strengthen relationships. And it created more opportunity to ensure all voices were heard in the process. In any group of humans there will be those who are more confident in speaking up. Having two Facilitators to 'hold space' meant they could spot this, and manage it effectively together.

3. Accountability

Facilitators hold a lot of power and potential influence in the process. Their individual views, biases, and approaches can have significant influence on what is done, and how.

Having two Facilitators was an effective way of acknowledging, and holding this influence in check. This extended to accountability for the wellbeing of individual commissioners and Empowerers. It can become easy for boundaries to become blurred through the process. And a co-facilitator can support in navigating this.

4. Wellbeing

The work of the Facilitator can be very challenging. It involves managing expectations, managing relationships, and keeping people safe through the process. It takes a lot of skill.

And as it can for any participant – whether Community Empowerer or Civic Commissioner, it can raise issues relating to their own experiences.

Having a partnership through the process can help safeguard wellbeing.

There is still a broader duty of host organisations as employers to make sure this is in place.

"I approached it with my whole self. I had to do to do it effectively but it exposed me very intensely."

What made co-facilitation work

1. Working flexibly.

Whilst James' was the lead on recruitment of Community Empowerers, and Cheryl on Civics, they worked closely on both aspects. This meant they could effectively reflect on the process, both had strong relationships across the Commission, and could identify next steps together.

2. Being open to learning

Whilst they worked to their strengths, they were both open to learning about ways of working from each other. This meant that one person wasn't relied upon, and if they were absent things stopped.

3. Having people to talk to beyond the relationship

The work of Poverty Truth Commission is very intensive, and can be very exposing for all involved. And there will be times where difference in perspectives can create tension.

"If working closely on something it can be very intense. You're going to see it differently and you can't always bridge the gap."

This was sought from James and Cheryl's line manager, Gill.

The value of seeking out alternative voices

The Facilitators wanted to ensure that the Poverty Truth Commission was representative, and inclusive for people with different experiences of poverty. They wanted to give more people the opportunity to connect than might be achieved through more traditional routes of advertising the opportunity, and working with established Civic and Community Partners to identify those who could take part.

And so over a period of 5 months James and Cheryl spent time in community spaces like churches, warm hubs, libraries, and at community events like Dog Shows. They were just present, having a drink, talking to people.

'I'm still amazed that I found a job where I got to hang around in community cafes and hubs in a wide variety of settings to talk about football, the state of the world and their stories' James, PTC Facilitator

This approach, although longer, meant there was real diversity in the experiences of the Empowerers – across age, disability, gender, nationality, parental status, and care experience.

Proactively and continually working to be inclusive

A key reflection from the Community Empowerers is that the need to be inclusive in continual. Particularly once the process moves into areas that are more familiar for Civic Commissioners, and potentially.

For their to be equality, there has to continue to be intention in making the process accessible and inclusive for all.

Removing barriers to participation

The reality of poverty is that participation is often difficult, including for all the reasons the Poverty Truth Commission identified - transport, digital exclusion, physical and emotional wellbeing, having the information needed to know what is happening.

Access to information

The approach the Facilitators took to recruiting Empowerers is a key example of good practice. They visited people where they might be. They didn't rely on traditional forms of recruitment – advertising and social media. They were accessible in themselves.

There is a case to be made that the process did exclude those who wouldn't be present in those spaces. But in the early stages people were encouraged to invite friends, and spread the word. And as the first Commission, testing the process was important.

Communication

Through the first two phases of the Commission, Facilitators were very proactive in communication. They recognised that for some people simply sending the information out isn't enough – conversation is needed to process the information, and decide what to do with it.

They also recognised that not everyone has access to digital communication. For people without access to email, they would call or text. For people with no phone they would leave messages at places they would visit. And information was sent by post to people's homes.

This communication approach faltered during the Working Groups, with a reliance on email to communicate, which excluded some members of the group.

Location and transport

Considering the location of meetings is important – accessibility in terms of transport, and physical access, and a place people feel comfortable.

Some professional settings, particularly early on, can be isolating, or can impact on the power dynamics in a meeting.

The neutrality first of PCVS offices, and then Churches was important.

PCVS also ensure that there was sufficient budget to cover people's travel costs including taxis where required.

Physical and emotional wellbeing

Facilitators recognised that people's wellbeing may fluctuate, which might impact on their engagement.

Checking in with people who didn't attend was important – to support them to come if needed or wanted. As was creating a safe space for people.



The complexity of Facilitation

The role of the Facilitator is essential in ensuring that the principles of Poverty Truth are upheld, the process is well managed, and everyone is supported to engage. But the nature of the work can create complexity in the role that needs to be well managed.

The tension of relational and professional

Both of the Facilitators talked about the tension between creating a genuinely relational experience – focused on building trust and human connection, and managing the role as a 'service provider'.

"You can't separate the experience of poverty that is often ongoing. This is deeply personal for people. If you're asking for them to give so much, they need to be supported to make that possible."

Empowerers are often still experiencing poverty, or the impact of poverty. And for them to be involved they may need practical and emotional support.

The learning from the Poverty Truth Commission is to:

- Recruit and train Facilitators to be able to manage this effectively
- Fully acknowledge and plan for this as a host organisation including having the policies, budget and support in place
- Co-create rules as a commission.

This last one is particularly important. As James says:

"Our Community Empowerers would have had bureaucracy weaponised against them. You can develop policies as a group around what the expectation is in terms of behaviour, how people treat each other, respecting people's privacy."

Providing practical support

Where possible Facilitators would signpost people to support. But one of the key issues locally is that there has been a significant reduction in the face to face support and guidance people need, and the Facilitators often found it difficult to navigate how to support people practically. It is important to have clear expectations around the role of the Facilitator, and what they can do when there is no other support available.

"They're not going to engage if you keep saying no."

Emotional support

The Poverty Truth Commission process can be very emotional and increase vulnerability. For many people they are sharing their stories for the first time, and having realisations about their experiences.

Peer support was provided in the sessions, and through check-ins by the Facilitators.

But there is need for Facilitators to be skilled in having safe conversations around mental health, managing vulnerability, and helping people to share their stories safely.

James undertook a mental health first aid training course to support him in this work. And training in managing difficult conversations, and conversations about mental health is important for Facilitators to be able to safely respond.

Safeguarding responsibilities

This balance extends to the responsibilities of organisations in relation to safeguarding.

Everyone has responsibility for safeguarding, and raising concerns. But when representing an organisation, as the Facilitators did, it can act against equalising of power.

Having real clarity on this role, and transparency on when safeguarding concerns might be raised is really important.

It is also essential that the host organisation has really good policy and support around safeguarding, particularly for this type of engagement work.

Managing expectations and boundaries

It is important to establish boundaries and why they exist early on.

This is to protect the wellbeing of both Facilitators who need to be able to switch off from the process, and Empowerers who need to be able to access support from people who are appropriately trained.

Examples include having a work phone that is off when not at work, not giving lifts to people, and not visiting in their home, so making sure there is the budget for people to use taxis to participate.



Managing transitions and expectations

The Poverty Truth Commission follows a set process. Whilst it is designed to build safe and trusting relationships, managing expectations and transitions can still be challenging.

There were two stages when this was more challenging:

1) Moving to Full Commission meetings.

Some Empowerers were frustrated after 10 meetings of building relationships together, that the process was starting again with Civics. Having the process established helped with this. But it is a point of tension to focus on.

2) Moving to Working Groups.

This is the stage where many Empowerers felt that their voice was not represented, decisions were less clear, and the process was top down. This may, in part be down to the familiar structure and nature of working groups for Civics and Facilitators who have worked in this way for a long period of time. And so usual patterns of working emerged without realizing the barriers they might create. For example all communication being done via email. The learning for Facilitators has been to remember the ways of working that were set – accessible and flexible communication, check ins, and bringing the Full Commission back together.

The tension of progress over process

One of the tensions that facilitators hold is the expectations of progress, and tangible change.

This was something expressed by the Empowerers – that they expected more tangible changes, and didn't realise they were working to change minds more broadly. And it may have influenced what happened during establishment of Working Groups.

The reality is, that as much as relational work has been proven to be essential in creating real change to systems, there is often an expectation of 'tangible outcomes' to prove something has worked.

There was significant external interest in the process, and being able to evidence change has happened is important.

This can create pressure on the PTC process – which is deliberately slow and relational, moving towards change in the latter part of the process with an expectation that there will be an embedding of practice to sustain, and build momentum around changes.

This is a difficult challenge to navigate, when working with partners and people who expect results, in ways that are less familiar.

The role of the host organisation

Much of the learning outlined above relates to the host organisation's roles and responsibilities to ensure that Facilitators can fulfil the role safely and well. There is an additional role that wasn't highlighted by the Facilitators, but is an observation of the whole process, and links to the recommendations on connections to broader agendas.

A challenge for the Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission was that there was a period of transition between leaders at PCVS, which meant that opportunity to pursue strategic connections, and fulfil a broader influencing role were not fulfilled.

With new leadership now in place, there is potential to further embed the work and lessons of the Poverty Truth Commission – both within PCVS and more broadly in the city.



EXPERIENCE OF CIVIC COMMISSIONERS

This section sets out the experience of the Civic Commissioners, what their motivations and expectations were, and how being involved has influenced their work.

Civic Commissioners were surveyed and interviewed as part of the evaluation.

Why Civic Commissioners became involved

Many of those who became involved were directly invited by Christina (the former CEO of PCVS who brought the work to the city), James and Cheryl. Others joined because they were asked to represent their organisation by someone more senior in their organisation. This highlights the importance of the relational approach, as well as the importance of the relationships and reputation of the host organisation.

Not all of those approached became involved. Because of organisational capacity, individual capacity, and engagement in other agendas and programmes in the city. For those that did, there were clear themes about why they were involved:

Because they believe in involving people with lived experience in making decisions.

"This approach is essential and represents a much-needed investment in the communities of Peterborough."

Because is part of their job to listen to the voices of those who use services, and this process provided a new opportunity to listen to different voices.

"This work takes relationships and money. It was a fantastic platform and opportunity for us." To gain a deeper understanding of poverty in Peterborough – what causes it, and what impacts on it.

"PETERBOROUGH has one of the largest migrated populations outside of London and with that comes poverty and low income families I wanted to understand how this effect health inequalities."

To understand how they could improve their individual services

"How we as a small charity could better support those who are or have experienced poverty."

Expectations of the process

As outlined above people became involved for different reasons, which influenced their expectations of what could be achieved. Three key expectations were highlighted through the evaluation:

Improvements in services and processes

System change Deepen understanding of poverty in the city

This influenced people's level of engagement.

For those who were focused on tangible change in services and processes, they were more likely to continue to be involved through the whole process, as there was clear benefit for their role.

Those who were expecting Systems Change didn't stay as involved, because this was work they were doing elsewhere, and they had other mechanisms for listening to people with lived experience.

And for those wanting to have deeper understanding of poverty in the city specifically the process did not meet their expectations

"I came away without a strong impression of what the causes of poverty were, why people in Peterborough fall into poverty and cannot escape it, or what systematically could be done about it."

As this was the first Poverty Truth Commission in Peterborough it is expected that there are different views on the purpose. And the evaluation has shown that work has been done across all three of these aspects:

- Changes to services provided by Civic Commissioners as a result of the Commission
- Foundations for systems change, which can be built on. But this is long term, intentional work which needs to be connected to other agendas.
- Deeper understanding of poverty was achieved for individuals, particularly those who have not experienced poverty. But given the purpose of the process to test what change can be created through sharing experiences, and the very small numbers of people involved, we wouldn't expect to have deep knowledge from the process alone.

However, these different expectations point to the importance of having real clarity of purpose for future Poverty Truth Commissions, and connecting with broader agendas.

Experience of the process

There were varied views on the experience of the process, which were influenced by the role the background of commissioners, the expectations they have, and the stage they became involved. Those who were fully involved through the process had the most positive experiences.

"It's important to go through the whole process. And to understand that your opinion isn't the only one."

Many Civic Commissioners highlighted the importance, and skill of the Facilitators through the process.

Both in terms of how they managed and ran meetings:

"I value the way these meeting operated, and the facilitation is essential to get right. I always came away feeling positive."

"I found the meetings very engaging, and they brought people together from a variety of backgrounds and lived experience. A safe space was created that allowed people to share and vocalise their thoughts and ideas."

And also in the way they worked with Community Empowerers:

"The facilitators genuinely empowered people from the ground up. They managed to lead positive change. People felt good and they felt heard."

"The way the Facilitators worked with people with Lived Experience was good. People felt empowered and safe from what he observed. And that the patterns and times worked for Empowerers, with real flexibility."

One Civic felt that the Facilitators were overly directive during Working Group meetings. However the Civic Commissioner hadn't been involved throughout the process with the Full Commission. Which highlights the importance of building relationships over time, so that the action phase is understood

"Led from the front by [facilitator] with a set agenda which [they] often rushed through quickly."

Individual impact

For systemic change to happen, there needs to be change for individuals in their understanding and approach to poverty (mental models).

Civic Commissioners were asked if involvement in the Poverty Truth Commission had altered their understanding of people who experience poverty, or improved their trust in people who experience poverty. These mirrored the questions asked of the Community Empowerers to understand the extent to which the principles of co-production had been achieved.

The results were varied, which may be expected given that those becoming involved were more likely to have an interest in poverty, or work in services where people are more likely to be experiencing poverty.

For some people it was more a reminder, reconnecting with the reasons they had started their work. This was certainly the case for Matt Oliver, Head of Stronger Communities.



"I have a better understanding of how the people affected my decisions and the decisions my organisation makes."

40% strongly agree

40% agreed

20% No change

"By hearing the frustrations and challenges faced by those experiencing poverty I have a clearer understanding on just how much of an impact poverty has on people lives, not just homelessness but everywhere inbetween too."

For Maria Finch, Head of Patient Experience at North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust (NWAFT) which runs local hospitals and maternity services, being involved had a significant impact on her.

"I had this preconception about who was in poverty, and what it was like. I had unconscious bias about poverty. And it's been blown away through this process"

Organisational impact

The tangible actions that occurred within the Poverty Truth Commission were undertaken by individual organisations represented by the Civic Commissioners – Jobsmart and Peterborough City Council. So, there was organisational impact because changes occurred as a result of the process. And we can assume that the changes for individuals will influence broader organizational changes.

For NWAFT, there is clear change within their organisation as set out in the diagram overleaf.

Understanding these ripple effects will be important to understanding whether systemic change is happening as a result of this, and any future Commissions.

Systemic impact

As outlined in the 'What was achieved' section, the Poverty Truth Commission laid the foundations for systemic change – bringing together people with lived experience, and organisations that can have impact, focusing on building trusting relationships and shared understanding, and identifying mutual actions. The tangible impact for NWAFT, from the individual impact on Maria is another example of how systemic change could be influenced by the PTC. But for those Civic Commissioners who want to see systems change being influenced, they recognise that this is just the start of the process, but an important one. Because it has raised the flag and caught the attention of those people with most power to affect change.

"The Poverty Truth Commission is important. That they worked hard to raise the flag. The number of people, and seniority of those who attended the Poverty Truth Commission Launch was an important exercise to bring people together, and create real life emotion for people who might have become disconnected."

Impact of the experience

Individual impact

For systemic change to happen, there needs to be change for individuals in their understanding and approach to poverty (mental models).

Civic Commissioners were asked if involvement in the Poverty Truth Commission had altered their understanding of people who experience poverty, or improved their trust in people who experience poverty. These mirrored the questions asked of the Community Empowerers to understand the extent to which the principles of co-production had been achieved.

The results were varied, which may be expected given that those becoming involved were more likely to have an interest in poverty, or work in services where people are more likely to be experiencing poverty.

For some people it was more a reminder, reconnecting with the reasons they had started their work. This was certainly the case for Matt Oliver, Head of Stronger Communities.



"I have a better understanding of how the people affected my decisions and the decisions my organisation makes."

40% strongly agree

40% agreed

20% No change

"By hearing the frustrations and challenges faced by those experiencing poverty I have a clearer understanding on just how much of an impact poverty has on people lives, not just homelessness but everywhere inbetween too."

For Maria Finch, Head of Patient Experience at North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust (NWAFT) which runs local hospitals and maternity services, being involved had a significant impact on her.

"I had this preconception about who was in poverty, and what it was like. I had unconscious bias about poverty. And it's been blown away through this process"

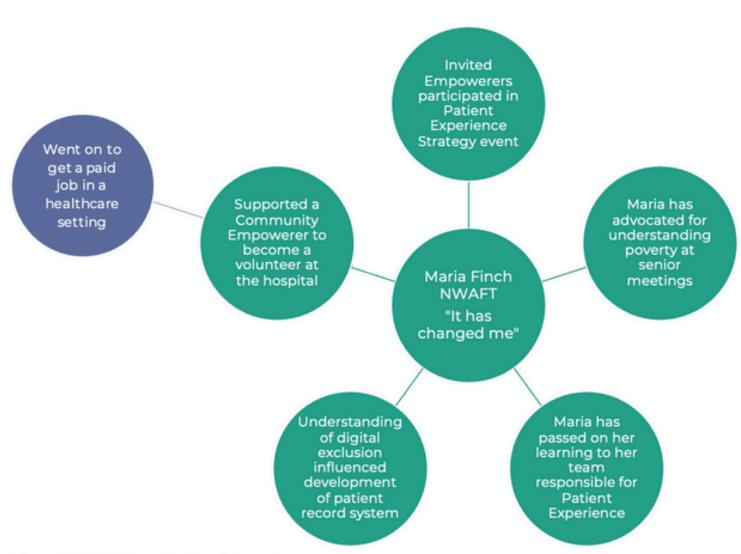


Figure 1 NWAFT Organisational Impact

CONCLUSION

The Poverty Truth Commission in Peterborough has been a success:

- 1) Effectively bringing people with lived experience together with people who make decisions and seeing what can happen.
- 2) Building lasting relationships between Community Empowerers and Civic Commissioners.
- 3) Having impact on individuals, organisations, and systems which can create real change for people experiencing poverty
- 4) Enabling learning about what is possible in Peterborough to work in this way, what is important for others looking to build on the work, and who is committed to doing this work.
- 5) Raising the flag with key organsiations, and city leaders of the value of this way of working.

These are important foundations.

The Recommendations section sets out some potential next steps to build on these foundations.

But what Poverty Truth Commission has demonstrated is that it is pssible to create real change, when time is given to building relationships, building trust, and making genuine connections.

Appendix one – Evaluation Approach

This evaluation was undertaken by Ali Lyons, an indepedendent evaluator and systems practitioner with 21 years experience working in the charity sector in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire.

Ali regularly works in partnership with PCVS, and has been on the peripheray of the Poverty Truth Commission throughout, attending events, and having regular conversations with the Facilitators.

In line with the principles of the Commission Ali undertook a combined Systems Approach adopting participatory approaches, to ensure that the Community Empowerers were an active part of the evaluation, and the story that is told.

Evlauation included:

- One to one conversation with 2 Community Empowerers
- Round table conversation with 5 Community Empowerers
- Survey completed by 6 Community Empowerers
- One to one conversation with 3 Civic Commissioners
- Survey completed by 7 Civic Commissioners
- Round table conversation with Facilitators
- Review of data on engagement and attendance provided by Facilitators
- Review of reflections, blogs, reports and newsletters compiled by the Facilitators throughout the process.

THANK YOU

Thank you to all the people and community organisations that have opened their doors, given us access, helped us make connections, and just generally made this project possible. This is not an exhaustive list. Peterborough opened its heart to us, and we will be forever thankful.

Civic Commissioners and Organisations

Clare Roberts, Julia Coulton, and everyone else at the Poverty Truth Network

All the staff, volunteers, and trustees at PCVS.

Gill Benedikz, who'd hate being on this list but really deserves it.

Brian Henry and Wellsprings Community Church

Yasmin Ilahi and everyone else at GLADCA

Moez Nathu and everyone at PARCA

Help Empowering Lives in Peterborough

Olufemi Olasoko and everyone St. Marks Church

Roger Kaye, for the beautiful song

Michelle Dalliston and everyone at St. Johns Church

Louise Ravenscroft, Ousman Gaye, and everyone else at Family Voice

Family Action

Families First

Chris Dalliston and everyone at Peterborough Cathedral

Helen Culy and everyone else at Bretton Baptist Church

The Communities Team at Peterborough City Council

Ria Demirsoy and Matt Oliver from the Housing Needs Team at Peterborough City Council

Park Road Baptist Church

Foodcycle Peterborough

Sally Williams and everyone else involved in Peterborough's Trussel Trust food banks

Katy Wilde and everyone else at Barnardo's

Carol Avery and everyone else at St. Michael's Church

Sharon Keogh

Steven Pettican and everyone else at The Light Project Peterborough and The Garden House

Siobahn Merrygold and everyone else at the Dementia Resource Centre

Civic Commissioners and Organisations

Anameeka Ghossh Cross Keys Homes

Becky Slade University Centre Peterborough

Sharon Keogh Anglia Ruskin University

Maria Finch Metal

Jonathan Jelley Peterborough Presents

Mohammed Farooq Faustina Yang

Esther Baffa-Isaacs Jo Mann and everyone at Job Smart

Sarah Blackledge Kelly Thomas

Sue Allen Sara Basuc

Laura Stent Rob Hill

Heidi Haxeltine Sarah Young

Susan Davidson Will Plant

Sameena Yaqoob and the ISLAH Research Institute Danielle Black

Andy Coles

Tom Hennessy

Community Empowerers

Sara Roy

Omar Sandra

Ismail Iona

Sadie Sheila

Beckii Raziya

Rosemary