

Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission

Final Report July 2024

Authors: Sophie Wilson, Prof. James Rees, Hugh Douglas, Andre Castro-Bilbrough, Sam Teo
and Susannah Wilson

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1. Executive Summary

The Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission #2 (BPTC#2) was commissioned by the Birmingham City Council's Public Health team and delivered by Thrive Together Birmingham. It ran from 2020-2023 and aimed to establish a sustainable model for fostering dialogue and collaboration between individuals with lived experiences of poverty - Community Commissioners - and those in positions of power - Civic Commissioners.

Recruitment and Facilitation

Recruiting both Community and Civic Commissioners was a complex and time-consuming process, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The two-year commitment required significant relationship-building and a clear understanding of the project's aims. Eleven Community Commissioners and eight Civic Commissioners were ultimately recruited.

Facilitators played a crucial role in ensuring inclusivity and creating a safe space for sharing experiences. They employed participatory techniques, such as "Rounds," and dedicated significant time to planning sessions, preparing the Commissioners, and providing follow-up support.

Activities and Impact

The BPTC#2 journey involved distinct phases:

- Phase 1: Community Commissioners built relationships and shared stories, culminating in a Launch Event ("Our Truth") featuring various storytelling formats.
- Phase 2: Civic Commissioners joined, and the commission focused on identifying key issues and developing "Listening & Conversation Events" on housing, poverty & health in children and families, and poverty & health in food.

A final event in July 2023 brought together commissioners and guests to share the journey and outcomes.

Key Findings

The evaluation of BPTC#2 highlighted several significant findings:

- Individual Impact: Commissioners experienced personal growth, increased confidence, and enhanced communication skills. Community Commissioners, in particular, found the process therapeutic, leading to practical improvements in their lives and greater involvement in community initiatives.
- Impact on Civic Leaders: The events exposed civic leaders to lived experiences, prompting reflection and a shift toward local, collaborative solutions that prioritise dignity.
- City-wide Impact: The BPTC#2 influenced policy and strategy development across sectors, fostered collaboration, and shifted language and approaches toward dignity and choice. However, translating the impact of this "slow activism" was more difficult for those further removed from the commission.

Recommendations

The evaluation of BPTC#2 yielded several recommendations for future initiatives:

- Recruitment: Dedicate substantial time and resources to sensitive and representative recruitment.
- Facilitation: Employ more open and adaptive dialogue methods while ensuring facilitator competence and a balance between guidance and commissioner ownership.
- Impact: Design programs with intrinsic mechanisms for co-enquiry, co-design, and co-production to empower community commissioners in systems redesign.
- Sustainability: Share learning, promote the PTC model, and highlight its successes and impact to policymakers and practitioners.

The BPTC#2 demonstrates the power of fostering dialogue and collaboration between those with lived experiences of poverty and those in positions of power. By putting lived experience voices at the core of its work, the commission has contributed to personal transformation, influenced policy and strategy development, and fostered a city-wide shift toward a more just and equitable approach to addressing poverty.

2. Context: Background & Aims of the Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission #2

Birmingham is one of the most diverse and economically successful cities in the UK; however, this wealth is not evenly distributed across the city. Health and social care inequalities are stark, 40% of Birmingham's 1.2 million residents live in the most deprived communities in Britain, and 1-in-3 children live in poverty.¹ The population of the city is projected to reach no overall ethnic majority by 2025.

The first Poverty Truth Commission (PTC) launched in Scotland in 2009 and since then PTCs have been run in more than twenty locations across the UK, now supported by the [National Poverty Truth Network](#) established in 2019.

A PTC aims to create long-term change by fostering dialogue, empathy, and collaboration between individuals with lived experiences of poverty and those with the power to influence policies. By bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and forms of knowledge, a PTC seeks to develop inclusive and informed decision-making processes to address systemic challenges. This process involves establishing honest and open relationships between Community Commissioners and Civic Commissioners, sharing personal stories, identifying key issues, and working together to find solutions

Birmingham's first PT¹C (BPTC#1), funded by Barrow Cadbury Trust and partners, was delivered by [Thrive Together Birmingham](#) between 2017-2019. Learning from the first commission was reported in the final report, Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission, [A Window On Our Conversations 2017-2019](#). Following the success of BPTC#1, Birmingham City Council's Public Health team commissioned BPTC#2 which ran from 2020 – 2023. BPTC#2 was delivered by Thrive Together Birmingham following an open tender process.

The aims of BPTC#2 were to:

- Establish a sustainable model for the Poverty Truth Commission that supports bringing in new cohorts of commissioners to explore new topics (building on the assets and legacy from the previous commission).
- Explore/use the potential for the wider panel of commissioners to act as a citizen panel on non-topic focused engagement/issues and co-development opportunities in wider context of the Council's work.
- Establish an annual cycle of Poverty Truth Commission explorations based on the wider determinants of health and wellbeing, starting with Housing in 2020/21.

This report presents the evaluation of the BPTC#2.

¹ Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System, <https://www.birminghamsolihullics.org.uk/about-us/our-places>

3. Evaluation framework & methodology

The evaluation team has worked closely with the BPTC#2 since its inception in early 2021, and the evaluation was guided by inquiry at two interconnected levels:

- *Individual level* – exploration of personal impact on individual community and Civic Commissioners and how being involved in the project changes the way they live or work.
- *System level* – the realised (or potential) impact on the policy, strategy and system responses to poverty across the city.

The evaluation centred firstly on the **process** of the BPTC#2 including the recruitment of community and Civic Commissioners, the way in which the BPTC#2 was facilitated and delivered, and the experiences of those involved. The second part of the evaluation focuses on **insights** derived from the BPTC#2 activities and the wider **actual or potential impact** of the commission.

The evaluation design incorporated several qualitative evaluation methods as set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Evaluation Design

Method	Activity	Rationale
Workshops	<i>Theory of Change Development:</i> workshop with BPTC facilitators and commissioners from previous BPTC in Summer 2021.	Developing an early 'roadmap' for BPTC, providing framework for evaluation: reviewed at later points to develop final To.
	Desk-based review and refresh of TOC at end of Commission March 2023.	
	<i>Ripple Effects Mapping:</i> workshop with BPTC facilitators and civic/community commissioners from BPTC#1 and BPTC#2	REM Workshop held to explore the 'ripple effects' of the BPTC bringing in voices from both commissions.
Participant Researcher Observation	<i>Participant Researcher Observation Community Commissioner Sessions:</i> 14 sessions and 1 launch event attended.	Embedded research - attending BPTC as a participant researcher to closely observe the process of BPTC
	<i>Participant Researcher Observation: Full Commission Session:</i> 12 BPTC sessions, 2 Listening Events and Final Event attended	Embedded research - attending BPTC as a participant researcher to closely observe the process of BPTC
	<i>Collation of Insights</i> Summary of stories and experiences shared by Community Commissioners.	Capturing key insights offered by Community Commissioners through launch events and BPTC sessions.
Semi-Structured Interviews	Project inception: Facilitators n=2	Exploring recruitment and onboarding of Community Commissioners
	Launch Event: n=9 (Guests)	Interviews with invited guests and potential Civic Commissioners to explore views and ambitions of BPTC
	Project End: Community (n=6) and Civic (n=5) Commissioners, Stakeholders/guests (n=4), host organisation (n=2) facilitators (n=2)	Interviews held with Community Commissioners, civic commissions and invited guests exploring impact of BPTC
Review of Monitoring Reports	Review of monthly monitoring forms submitted by Thrive Together Birmingham to the Public Health Team (BCC).	To capture information relating to Listening Events and additional activities undertaken by the BPTC#2

As noted in Table 1, over the course of the evaluation, a Theory of Change (Box 1) was iteratively developed. The final version is presented in Section 5 and draws on the findings from the process and impact evaluation.

Box 1: Theory of Change

A Theory of Change (ToC) is a graphic and narrative explanation of how and why a change process is expected to happen in a particular context. It defines long-term goals and then maps backwards to identify changes thought to be necessary to the goal that need to happen earlier (preconditions). It also identifies the inputs (e.g. Resources, people), and assumptions which need to be in place for change to happen.

A ToC looks to explain change process by showing all the causal linkages in an initiative, i.e. its shorter-term, intermediate, and longer-term outcomes. The identified changes are mapped graphically, showing each outcome in a logical relationship to all the others, and connected to one another by arrows that imply causality as well as chronological flow. Desired impacts are also shown.

Adapted from Theory of Change in a Nutshell by Hel ne Clark

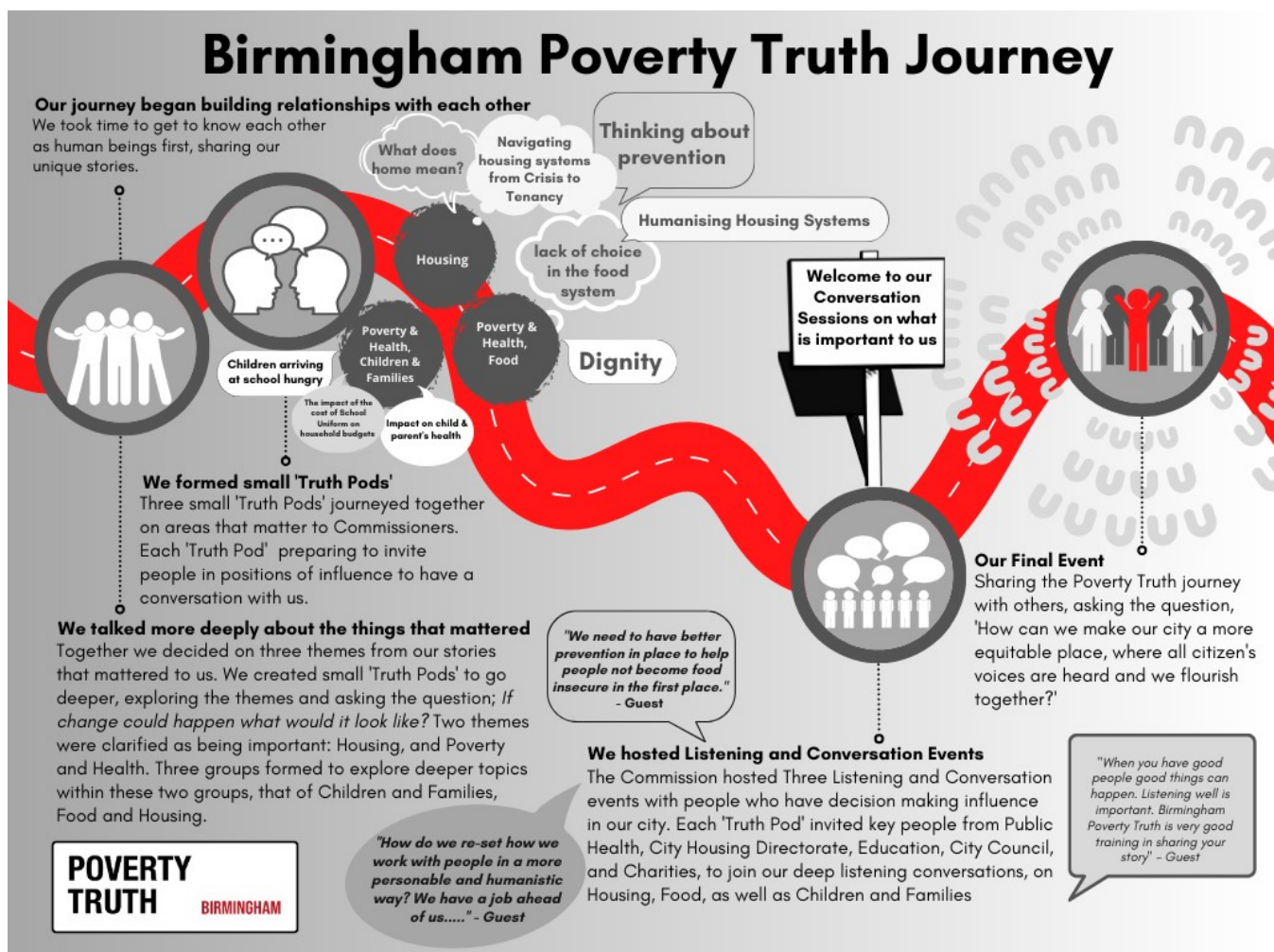
<https://i2insights.org/2021/08/24/theory-of-change-in-brief/>

4. The BPTC#2 Approach

A timeline of the BPTC#2 is set out below.



The BPTC#2 Journey was captured by the Thrive Together Birmingham team in the illustration below:



As illustrated in the journey, a PTC takes place across two distinct phases. The first phase involves the recruitment of Community Commissioners, individuals with lived experience of poverty. The second phase of the PTC sees the established commission joined by the Civic Commissioners, those with strategic influence. In the BPTC#2 the total number of commissioners engaged were:

- 11 Community Commissioners
- 8 Civic Commissioners

Thrive Together Birmingham led on management of the contract. Three members of staff were contracted by Thrive Together Birmingham to work on the BPTC#2, two session facilitators and one note-taker – all of whom worked on the project for one day a week.

The BPTC#2 delivered:

- 15 conversation sessions with Community Commissioners
- Launch Event
- 11 conversation sessions with both Community and Civic Commissioners
- 3 'Listening & Conversation Events' (Housing, Poverty & Health – Children and Families, Poverty & Health – Food)
- Final Event
- Legacy Activity

4.1 Inside the room

'The principles are all based on relationships. What are those relationships that mean that we start to question that power hierarchy that we need to bring into the space so that people can genuinely feel part of something?' (Facilitator)

The BPTC#2 sessions generally followed a set format, described as follows:

- Sessions began informally, with a circle check-in involving light questions, fostering a warm atmosphere, using the 'Rounds' technique (Box 2)
- Questions were used to enable stories to emerge that then led to key themes being identified. Discussion then developed around these topics.
- Breaks allowed for informal conversations, and the formal sessions concluded with a reflective 'check-out' question (again, using 'Rounds').
- Post-session, commissioners shared lunch, which resembled the break atmosphere but offered more one to one interaction.

Throughout the commission, building relationships was a central focus, achieved through sharing personal stories and experiences. Progress was ensured by reflecting on previous sessions, summarising discussions and displaying quotes on the wall.

Planning of the Launch Event 'Our Truth': Leading up to the launch event in May 2022, a poet was commissioned to work with Community Commissioners to help them imaginatively articulate and communicate their stories and to build their confidence to present. A videographer was commissioned to enable commissioners to bring their stories to life particularly where they were reluctant to do this in person.

Planning of the Listening Events: Once the Civic Commissioners joined the commission, there were more break-out activities where commissioners worked together in small groups, or 'truth pods' to explore themes in more depth. The commission worked together to agree three themes that formed the basis of the 'Listening & Conversation' events with the 'truth pods' identifying sub-themes within each of these to inform discussion at these events. These events were held between April and June 2023. People of influence across the city were invited to attend each event.

Box 2: “Rounds”

Rounds are one of the tools used in Nancy Kline’s Thinking Environment approach, to give everyone in a room the chance to speak and be heard. Participants sit in a circle and the Chair asks for a volunteer to start and indicates which way round the circle the thinking will move. There are usually multiple rounds, which will ask a different question each time. The Chair confirms the agenda and identifies the first item for discussion - each item is in the form of a question that focuses on the desired outcome from discussion of that item. The Chair then asks the question that will be addressed in a particular round. Everyone is given a turn to speak, knowing they will not be interrupted. The other participants give full attention which helps to stimulate that person’s thinking. The Chair can then summarise the viewpoints and suggest the common ground / agreements reached. The group then have the opportunity (in a Round) to agree with or shape the conclusions. The closing round asks everyone to answer positively reflective questions.

Adapted from Kline, N. (2009), *More Time to Think: A Way of Being in the World*. Burley-in-Wharfedale, Fisher King.

4.2 Outside the Room

Session Planning: Facilitators invested significant time in planning how sessions would be conducted to ensure balanced participation and inclusivity. This preparation involved shaping questions to encourage broad involvement and managing the flow of discussions to prevent any single voice from dominating. This process was resource-intensive and required skills in participatory techniques, such as the ‘Rounds,’ to facilitate engagement.

Pre-Meetings: Pre-meetings were held with both community and Civic Commissioners to prepare them for participation. These meetings were crucial for helping commissioners understand the PTC’s unique environment, which differed from typical professional settings. Civic Commissioners needed guidance on engaging as individuals rather than through their professional roles. This preparation included sharing insights from previous commissions and setting expectations for the types of conversations and approaches used.

Post-Session Follow-Up: After each session, facilitators maintained regular contact with commissioners to provide support and address any concerns. This ongoing engagement was vital for sustaining involvement and ensuring commissioners felt supported. These follow-ups included checking in on their well-being, discussing challenges, and encouraging continued participation.

Launch, Listening Events and Final event Planning: Considerable time and effort went into planning of the launch and final event, and the coordination of the listening events to ensure that people of influence attended. This also included event organisations (venues, food etc).

Other activities supporting the BPTC#2: The Thrive Together Birmingham CEO represented BPTC at the Creating a City without Inequality Forum (a sub-committee of the Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board) and other partnership meetings where progress was reported and opportunities for discussion involving BPTC#2 Commissioners themselves were provided, enabling them to share their experiences and insights into the work and impact of BPTC#2.

5. Key findings from the evaluation of the process

5.1 Recruitment Challenges

The recruitment of both community and Civic Commissioners for the BPTC#2 was a complex and time-consuming process, further challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic. Recruitment of Community Commissioners began as the country emerged from the second national lockdown in spring 2021, requiring innovative strategies like online webinars due to the closure of usual meeting places on the one hand, whilst balancing the need to 'meet people where they are' on the other.

Facilitators understood that the PTC is a concept that cannot always be easily explained, and the ask is significant. A two-year commitment is not something that people will sign up to without a clear understanding of the project, and this required significant time to be invested in building up strong relationships with potential commissioners. Often, this involved multiple contacts (from initial meeting, follow up emails, follow up conversations) over a period of weeks, offering information, personal connection and support. The importance of taking the time to help people to really understand the aims of the BPTC was described as a critical component of the process.

As well as informing potential participants about what would be involved in the PTC, the facilitators used the recruitment period to build the relationship with the individual, encourage them, and ensure that they knew they would be entering a safe and welcoming space in which they would be supported to share their lived experience in a way that would be based on trust and relationships. Again, this required a significant time-commitment.

Ensuring diversity and safeguarding participants' vulnerabilities were also critical considerations. Facilitators were mindful to ensure that the recruited commissioners "*look like Birmingham*" (Facilitator). This was not a tokenistic spread of diverse commissioners strictly adhering to demographic representation of the city, which would be an impossible task, rather an inclusive approach which ensured a plurality of lived experience and voice. However, whilst recognising that the commission set out to avoid tokenism, some concerns were raised by interviewees about the limited representation of diverse communities, particularly in relation to the ethnicity of participants.

In the event, 11 Community Commissioners were recruited, with 8 becoming regular attendees.

For Civic Commissioners, recruitment followed the launch event in May 2022. The emphasis on housing as a priority theme led to targeted presentation to Birmingham Housing's senior management team but this had limited impact. In the end, recruitment was mainly through personal contacts and required detailed one-on-one interviews to clarify expectations of the PTC. Despite intending to recruit an equal number of Civic Commissioners to the Community Commissioners, the process yielded 8, with 5 of these remaining involved for the duration of the Full Commission.

5.2 Outside the room

Facilitators of the BPTC#2 emphasised the critical role of activities conducted outside the formal sessions. These activities included extensive planning, preparation, and follow-up efforts, essential for ensuring the success and inclusivity of the sessions. Overall, the work outside the PTC sessions was found to be resource-intensive but essential for fostering a supportive and effective environment.

5.3 Inside the Room

Findings related to activities that took place during the BPTC#2 sessions highlight the importance of careful facilitation, inclusivity, and the creation of a supportive environment:

Facilitation: Facilitators played a crucial role in ensuring that sessions were well-designed and inclusive, allowing everyone an opportunity to participate. The expertise of facilitators was a critical success factor, with a focus on building relationships and trust among commissioners and creating a sense of ownership and agency.

Community Commissioners specifically praised the simplicity and effectiveness of the way in which the BPTC#2 was facilitated, appreciating the opportunity it provided to have their voices heard. Civic

Commissioners also responded positively, noting the welcoming and supportive environment that facilitated open and honest engagement. It also supported Civic Commissioners to step out of their usual professional roles and engage at a more personal and empathetic level.

Overall, we found that the facilitation process involved several key elements:

1. **Building relationships:** The focus of the BPTC sessions is on building meaningful relationships between the commissioners.
2. **Humanised approach:** The facilitation process was found to emphasise human connection, active listening, and respect, creating a positive and uplifting atmosphere conducive to constructive dialogue and collaboration
3. **Creating Safe Spaces:** Facilitators emphasised the importance of creating safe spaces where individuals felt respected, listened to, and free to share their truths without judgment.
4. **Opportunity for Expression:** The facilitated sessions provided ample time and opportunities for individuals to express themselves authentically, ensure that diverse voices were heard and valued.
5. **Trauma-informed Approach:** Recognising the potential for traumatic experiences among participants; facilitators employed a trauma-informed approach to ensure everyone felt supported and understood.
6. **Equality and Inclusivity:** The facilitation process aimed to break down power hierarchies and foster a sense of equality and inclusivity, where everyone's voice was valued and no one voice dominated the discussion.
7. **Organic and relational growth:** The process allowed for organic and relational growth, where individuals were encouraged to share their truths at their own pace and comfort level.
8. **Structured dialogue:** Utilising structured dialogue formats like "rounds" helped ease introductions, encourage participation and facilitate meaningful conversations.

Rigidity in communication methods: Despite the generally positive findings regarding facilitation of the BPTC#2, the rigidity of communication methods, such as strict adherence to rounds and predetermined discussion topics, at times were felt to have stifled natural interaction and inhibited relationship-building.

Sometimes this limited opportunities for open discussion, with swift transitions between group summaries and less room for deeper exploration of ideas or disagreements.

Ownership: There was a clear understanding that, within the BPTC#2 model, commissioners should maintain ownership with facilitators serving only as guides. However, this was not always an observed reality. There were instances where facilitators took a more directive role, particularly in shaping session topics and steering discussions. This was in part due to requirements set out by the funder which pre-determined the topics and parameters of the commission.

For example, when selecting themes for the listening event, some commissioners felt that they were presented with options rather than independently identifying topics. Similarly, one commissioner highlighted the lack of involvement that the Community Commissioners had in determining who would be invited to the launch event and approached to become Civic Commissioners.

Challenges in scaling and outcomes: Challenges were noted in scaling the process effectively and in translating discussions into tangible outcomes, potentially limiting the overall impact of the commission.

Relationships, connections and divisions: Commissioners and facilitators all emphasised the importance of treating each other as equals and setting aside titles and of creating an environment where everyone felt valued and important. Despite initial nervousness, commissioners from both groups developed meaningful relationships over time, finding common ground through shared experiences and through their commitment to tackle poverty.

The relationship between the Community Commissioners were arguably stronger and the interaction between community and Civic Commissioners were reportedly sometimes awkward and lacking in depth. Nonetheless, a sense of genuine camaraderie and mutual respect was reported, with commissioners expressing surprise at the depth of relationships that developed throughout the commission.

There were reported conflicts which led to some commissioners experiencing a sense of frustration and stagnation. For example, tensions occasionally arose over policy matters and proposed ways in which to

address these. Different ways of talking and approaches to solving problems occasionally led to misunderstandings. Broadly these tensions were managed well by the facilitation team.

There was a lack of focus on personal story telling during the second phase of the commission. Community Commissioners noted that whilst their stories had been shared extensively both during the initial phase of the commission and at the launch event, Civic Commissioners were not asked to share their stories in the same way.

Revealingly, one community commissioner pointed out this issue in one of the sessions. They said that whilst they had shared personal experiences with everyone, the Civic Commissioners hadn't done the same when they joined the group. Even when the groups formed 'Truth Pods' to develop the listening events, Community Commissioners often talked about their personal experiences, whilst Civic Commissioners mostly talked about their involvement in the BPTC rather than sharing substantive, personal life experiences.

This lack of focus on storytelling in the second phase of the commission is likely because activities in this part of the BPTC were about bigger-picture topics, like imagining what future headlines could be and how to make them happen. However, given the importance the BPTC places on relationship building, based on the sharing of stories, it is worth considering whether this needs to be given more prominence in future commissions when Civic Commissioners join in the second phase.

Accessibility and support: It was evident that considerable efforts were made to ensure accessibility for all participants, including childcare provisions, transportation assistance, and a supportive environment, enhancing inclusivity and participation.

Time Commitment: Civic Commissioners described the challenge of being able to meet the time requirements/commitments of the commission

5.4 Additional Activities undertaken by the Commission

Additional activities which took place over the course of the commission were the Launch Event (May 2022) the 'Listening & Conversation' Events (May – July 2023) and the Final event (July 2023).

Launch Event 'Our Truth' 19th May 2022

The launch event consisted of the Community Commissioners sharing eight stories, presented in various formats, as well as two static displays and presentation boards.



April 2023: Listening Event 1: Poverty & Health – Children and Families

The first listening and conversation event centred around understanding the hidden costs of parenting for families experiencing poverty. The commissioners working on this theme as part of the 'truth pod' activity in the BPTC#2 sessions had identified three themes: the cost of school uniform for older children, food provision, including free school meals and life skills.

Community Commissioners shared their experiences of these themes and then engaged in a dialogue with the invited guests, including individuals from Birmingham City Council and the Birmingham Education Partnership. The conversation explored the challenges of food insecurity, school uniform costs, and the need for effective policies that support families, emphasising the importance of lived experience in policymaking. Guests and commissioners alike stressed the significance of collaborative efforts between

agencies, schools, and communities to create a supportive ecosystem for children and families.

Welcome to our

**Poverty and Health,
Children and Families Listening Event
Thursday 20th April 2023**

We held 3 listening events for specific guests, based on key themes we had worked on as a commission...

Commissioners shared experiences and offered a time of reflection, questions and conversation with our guests

Question 1

Our discussions have raised issues about food provision for children and the issue that many children arrive at school hungry....

What would you deem important about empowering parents and communities to maintain healthy children?

Question 2

In our conversations about school uniform, breakfast clubs and life skills, our personal experiences have raised issues that there are no new solutions, just old ones made new, with different names, language, and buzzwords.

In your opinion what policy or strategy has been the most effective in addressing families living in poverty and why?

Question 3

What would be the commitment for schools, health and other agencies to work alongside parents that is dignifying, not stigmatising towards families experiencing poverty?

Our voices and experiences

When you have good people good things can happen.
Listening is important.
Birmingham Poverty Truth is very good training in sharing your story"
- Guest

May 2023: Listening Event 2: Poverty & Health – Food

The second listening and conversation session involved commissioners sharing their experiences and highlighted issues of food bank dependency, stigma, and lack of choice. They emphasised three key areas: **Dignity, Lack of Choice, and Health**. The commissioners shared stories about food insecurity in Birmingham, connecting their local experiences to national narratives.

The invited guests provided initial feedback revealing the complexities of food insecurity and the normalization of food banks as a response to poverty. The group then went on to explore two questions:

- How to create a consistent and dignified food supply that meets diverse needs and
- How to envision a system that eradicates food banks and replaces them with more humane and choice-based alternatives like food pantries.

The session ended with reflections on the conversation's takeaways and potential actions for change.

Welcome to our

Poverty, Health and Food Listening Event

Thursday 18th May 2023

We held 3 listening events for specific guests, based on key themes we had worked on as a commission...

Commissioners shared experiences and offered a time of reflection, questions and conversation with our guests

Question 1

The Food Strategy principles speaks to working together, making it easier to access food and helping those who need it.

What would you deem important in how we create a consistent food supply, taking into account cultural, religious and dietary needs, that is dignifying for all those needing to access food?

Question 2

Our conversations have highlighted the difference between the foodbank and food pantry. We thought about in the future pushing the 're-set button' that enables us to eradicate foodbanks, creating more food pantries that cover the emergency element with a voucher system. Food Pantries could be easily accessible with more personal choice, more dignity and healthier options.

What can we imagine together that means everyone who needs to have access to food does so in a humanised and choice-based way?

"We need to have better prevention in place to help people not become food insecure in the first place"
- Guest

Foodbank Cooking...

CUPPA SOUP CARBONARA

POVERTY TRUTH

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 box of golden vegetable cuppa soup
- 1 tin of food bank ham, chopped
- Spaghetti
- Tin of mushrooms. If you have fresh mushrooms slice and lightly cook

METHOD:

- Make the 4 sachets of cuppa soup up but using slightly less water than called for to make a thicker sauce.
- Add cooked ham and chopped mushrooms.
- Cook spaghetti.
- Toss all ingredients together and enjoy 'Foodbank Carbonara'

This resourceful recipe was created by one of our Community Commissioners. Are you a creative cook? What would your 'Foodbank Recipe' be?

June 2023: Listening Event 3: Poverty & Housing

The third listening and conversation session focused on **Poverty & Housing**. Commissioners of the Poverty & Housing subgroup welcomed five guests from the City Housing Directorate and delivered an opening statement. This statement emphasised the commissioners' feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness within the housing system and the negative impact on their health and families. They highlighted the need for a system fix and presented three key topic areas for discussion: rehumanising the housing system, easier navigation of systems, and 'upstreaming'. Following the opening statement, stories were shared that illustrated the realities of navigating housing systems in Birmingham.

Both the commission and guests reflected on the shared stories. Key takeaways from the reflections included a pervasive sense of powerlessness, the negative impacts of housing on health and well-being, the need for a culture change within the housing system, and the system's current disjointed nature. Participants reflections emphasise the necessity of a culture change, and highlighted listening to stories as crucial for informing housing policies.

The value of 'upstreaming' (i.e. prevention) was acknowledged, recognising that more needs to be done to prevent people falling into crisis. Participants stressed the crucial relationship between health and housing and explored ways to improve it. Commissioners added that prolonged issue resolution leads to a greater impact on health and well-being, while small changes can have a significant positive impact.

Welcome to our

Poverty and Housing Listening Event Thursday 15th June 2023

We held 3 listening events for specific guests, based on key themes we had worked on as a commission...

Commissioners shared experiences and offered a time of reflection, questions and conversation with our guests

Question 1

What would be your intention to change the culture to involve citizens in creating and embedding housing policies?

Question 2

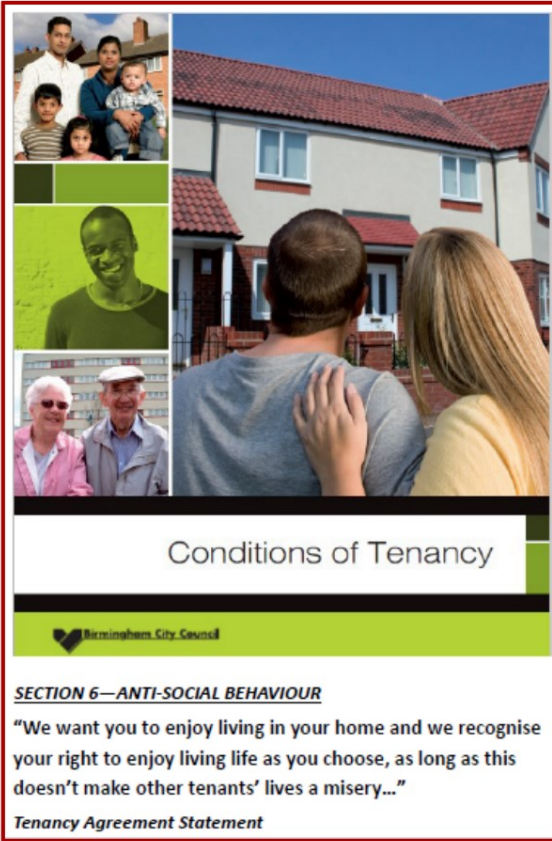
What value do you personally place on 'Up-Streaming' rather than 'Crisis' for citizens within the housing systems?

WARNING
ACCOMMODATION DOESN'T
ALWAYS FEEL LIKE HOME

"How do we re-set how we work with people in a more personable and humanistic way? We have a job ahead of us" - Guest

Question 3

What do you deem important in tackling the impact of housing on health that also addresses the health inequalities in our city?



Conditions of Tenancy

Birmingham City Council

SECTION 6—ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

"We want you to enjoy living in your home and we recognise your right to enjoy living life as you choose, as long as this doesn't make other tenants' lives a misery..."

Tenancy Agreement Statement

Final Event 12th July

The final event of the Poverty Truth Commission (PTC) took place at Birmingham Hippodrome on July 12, 2023. This event brought together over 60 commissioners and influential guests to share the commission's journey and outcomes. The event featured a gallery of "Truth Posters" and screen presentations to share the commission's story and experiences. A booklet was also produced, sharing the truths and experiences of the commissioners, including those who could not attend.

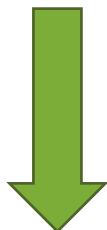


At the event Community Commissioners shared their personal reasons for joining and their experiences of telling their stories to decision-makers. Civic Commissioners similarly reflected on the profound impact of the commission on their perspectives and work.

6. Theory of change: Capturing the ‘Process’

Informed by observations and interviews conducted during the BPTC#2, an iterative ToC was developed. The final ToC is presented below.

Inputs



1. **Staff:** Skilled, committed facilitators to provide dedicated support to guide and support the commission and to effectively plan and prepare for sessions.
2. **Funding:** Necessary resources to run the project effectively
3. **Lived Experience Voice:** Real stories shaping our understanding of poverty
4. **Recruitment of Commissioners:** With a focus on diversity and representation of people who have lived experience of poverty in the first instance (Community Commissioners) and those in positions of power across the city in the second phase. (Civic Commissioners)
5. **Engagement with partners:** Early involvement with strategic partners across the city to increase reach and impact of the BPTC
6. **Coordination and planning of sessions and events:** Ensuring sessions and events are conducted in safe spaces, and at a time and venue that is convenient. Offering lunch and refreshments and covering any out-of-pocket expenses to ensure inclusivity/accessibility. Spending time planning the content and facilitation of each session and event.

Activities



1. **Co-design of a BPTC Truth Charter:** A set of principles developed by Community Commissioners during early meetings, establishing concepts of common consent and ownership of the process; equality and inclusivity; human connection; active listening and respect; constructive dialogue.
2. **Monthly BPTC Sessions with Community Commissioners:** Focused on building relationships through storytelling and working toward the launch event; **facilitated** through the use of structured dialogue formats such as ‘rounds’ and other conversation-based activities that encourage honesty, equality, active listening and reflection.
3. **Building relationships** achieved through sharing personal stories and experiences and ensuring opportunities to spend time together during breaks and lunch.
4. **Reflective Practice, Progress and Purpose:** Beginning each session with a recap from previous sessions to capture and demonstrate progress, and re-affirm the BPTC purpose; provide external support where required to help prepare for the Launch event (i.e. poet, visual artists, technical assistant)
5. **Launch Event:** To share stories and invite Civic Commissioners to join the BPTC.
6. **Monthly BPTC Sessions with both Civic and Community Commissioners:** Focused in building relationships and surfacing key issues and topics by sharing lived experience, storytelling, and discussion; using rounds and other sub-group discussion formats (Truth Pods) to develop ideas for listening events.
7. **Listening Events:** Aimed at engaging a wider group of stakeholders, to facilitate the further sharing of experience, problem-solving and collaborative approaches.
8. **Final Event:** To share the experiences of becoming a BPTC and highlight the impact.

HAVING THESE ACTIVITIES MEANS...

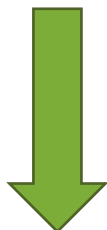
Outputs



1. **Shared Ownership:** Civic and Community Commissioners come together as equals where everyone feels valued and influential.
2. **Engagement:** The sustained, long-term engagement of both community and Civic Commissioners in the BPTC sessions, based on relationships and a shared commitment to tackling poverty.
3. **Insights:** A clear set of topics and issues identified as important to the Community Commissioners to inform the additional events taking place outside of the BPTC sessions themselves.
4. **Shared Learning:** A series of public events, building on the testimony of the commissioners to share understanding of their experiences, and the impact of their work.

FOR COMMISSIONERS, IN THE SHORT-TERM THESE OUTPUTS LEAD TO...

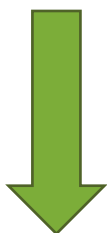
Outcomes



1. **Developing meaningful relationships:** Commissioners form meaningful personal relationships and a genuine camaraderie, transcending initial differences, that foster deeper understanding of poverty and an increased awareness of the challenges facing the city.
2. **A sense of belonging:** The creation of a 'community' that offers a sense of camaraderie, belonging and being 'part of something'
3. **Empowerment and validation:** Community Commissioners feel valued and empowered, with the recognition that their experiences are valid and their ideas are valuable, fostering a deeper understanding of their own worth.
4. **Enhanced Communication Skills:** Commissioners develop enhanced communication skills through active listening and thoughtful reflection, impacting on all areas of personal and professional life.
5. **Personal and Professional Growth:** Commissioners feel more informed about poverty-related issues and apply this to their own personal or professional lives, feeling inspired to do more and react differently and become even more knowledgeable about poverty justice.

FOR COMMISSIONERS AND WIDER STAKEHOLDERS, IN THE LONGER TERM THE OUTPUTS LEAD TO...

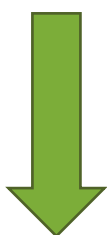
Outcomes



1. **Increased aspirations:** Commissioners are inspired to pursue further knowledge building, education, training and careers that align with their interests in social justice.
2. **'Thinking' and 'Doing' things differently:** Commissioners, and invited guests, act with a greater understanding of the importance of hearing and listening to the voices of people with lived experience.
3. **Renewed motivation:** Commissioners, and invited guests, approach their work or community action with renewed energy and dedication.
4. **Culture change:** Civic Commissioners, and invited guests, reflect on approaches and priorities and adopt a more human and empathetic approach which reduces stigma, foreground lived experience voice, dignity and participatory democracy.

SO THAT PEOPLE ENGAGING WITH THE PROJECT FIND THAT...

Impact



On an Individual Level:

Civic Commissioners have a deeper understanding of how policies affect people in poverty and use this to change how their organisation functions. They feel better qualified and equipped to voice concerns and advocate for change. Community Commissioners see improvement in their personal lives, using the skills they have learnt to improve family and community relationships.

Community Commissioners are inspired to be more involved in wider community projects and networks, contributing to the betterment of their communities and wider society.

On a community or organisational Level:

Organisations adapt ways of working, with a notable shift in language and approach towards principles of dignity and choice, reducing stigmatizing language and foregrounding the voice of people with lived experience.

A growing expectation for empathetic and human-centred systems.

Increased opportunity for collaboration, with organisations across sectors working together to become influential platforms for advocating against poverty.

And the overall goal:

Policies, processes, institutions, and systems in place to support people in poverty are better informed and better placed to respond effectively to need, by routinely listening to the voices of people with lived experience as equal partners.

6. Insights

Through the events and activities detailed above, several key insights were offered by the Community Commissioners, which have relevance for the way in which poverty is addressed. These are set out in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Insights

Insights	Summary
Interconnected nature of poverty	Stories highlighted the interrelated nature of poverty, affecting sleep, housing, health, employment, social life and food. Negative events triggered by a single change could lead to a cascade of problems, pushing individuals beyond their breaking point.
Need for prevention and collaboration	Throughout the commission and at the various events, commissioners emphasised the importance of prevention over crisis response in addressing poverty. Calls for collaborative efforts across organisations and sectors to address multi-faceted problems faced by those in poverty.
Impact on choices	Lack of power manifests in the limited choices individuals experiencing poverty have. Some had to accept unbearable situations due to the lack of viable choices, illustrating the challenges of decision-making.
Poverty can happen to anyone	A key insight was that poverty can affect anyone unexpectedly. It was however acknowledged that while this is true, certain starting disadvantages increase the likelihood.
Inclusion of lived experience voice	The importance of including voices of people experiencing poverty in policy and decision making was highlighted. Epistemic and moral reasons were cited, emphasising the need for policymakers to better understand the real experiences and perspectives of those in poverty.
Resilience and self-esteem	Poverty has a profound psychological effect, leading to depression, anxiety, and a lack of self-esteem. Commissioners underlined the importance of services that support individuals in poverty while allowing them to maintain their dignity. Resilience was a key theme, with individuals using it as a source of pride and a counter-narrative to negative stereotypes.

Overall, the insights highlight the complex and pervasive challenges faced by those in poverty, emphasising the need for a comprehensive, collaborative, and empathetic approach to address both power differentials and the interconnected issues and amplify the voices of those directly affected

7. Impact of the BPTC#2

At the Launch event in May 2022, we identified seven themes related to the anticipated impact of the BPTC#2 as expressed by commissioners and guests who attended. These are set out in the Table 3 below:

Table 3: Anticipated Impact May 2022

Theme	Summary of findings
Positive expectations	Attendees expressed positive expectations for the BPTC#2, largely influenced by the bravery and openness of the community commissioners. The model of directly hearing people's lived experience was considered impactful, although some uncertainty existed about the specific nature of the project's potential impact.
The power of lived experience	Hearing first-hand experiences was deemed crucial, providing a stark reminder of the reality faced by those in poverty. Testimonies were seen as a unique form of intelligence, complementing quantitative evidence and emphasising the need to stop 'doing to' and start 'doing with' people. There was recognition of the role of the voluntary and community sector in engaging with people with lived experience. There was also recognition of the necessity for broader changes in commissioning culture.
Renewing Motivation	The Launch Event inspired attendees to reflect on the importance of their work and the impact they could have on people's lives. Real experiences served as a reminder, combatting desensitisation to community challenges and experiences.
Informing Strategy and Systems Change	Attendees considered incorporating lived experiences into strategies addressing poverty, with a focus on co-designing strategies with community commissioners. The BPTC#2's longevity was seen as an opportunity for meaningful engagement and influencing strategic planning processes.
Culture Change	A prevailing theme was the imperative for culture change in systems and institutions. Front-line staff were not blamed for some of the poor practice experienced by people facing poverty with an acknowledgment that their work was difficult and often constrained by policy and procedure, but a need for cascading BPTC learnings to them was emphasised. Civic Commissioners were viewed as potential key influencers in provoking that change.
Partnership and joined up working	Collaboration across sectors, including statutory and voluntary, was seen as pivotal to achieving positive change. The BPTC#2's impact was envisioned to help create partnerships and foster this collaboration.
Personal Transformations	While personal transformation was mentioned as a potential impact, responses generally focused more on the transformative power of the stories shared.

At the end of the commission and informed by all the evaluation activities (observation, interviews, workshops) it is evident that many of these initial anticipated outcomes were realised. These are set out below.

7.1 Individual Impact (Commissioners)

The evaluation identified the following individual impact of being involved in the BPTC#2.

Profound personal impact: Both civic and Community Commissioners have experienced profound personal growth and transformation through their involvement with BPTC, although arguably this is more profound amongst Community Commissioners. This includes gaining valuable insights, forging meaningful connections, and experiencing a sense of belonging and validation. However, this impact can sometimes be intangible and difficult to quantify.

Therapeutic Effect and Practical Skills: Community Commissioners liken the experience to 'talking therapy' emphasising the cathartic effect of being heard and understood. Practical skills, such as efficient food management, have been acquired through the sharing of ideas and stories, empowering participants to make

tangible improvements in their lives.

Empowerment and validation: Community Commissioners feel valued and empowered within the commission, leading to increased confidence in expressing opinions and ideas. This newfound confidence extends beyond the commission, influencing their advocacy efforts and approach to social change.

Increased Confidence: Community Commissioners note a boost in confidence, feeling more empowered to share their experiences and opinions confidently. They no longer shy away from expressing themselves and feel more assertive in their communication.

Impact on personal interactions: Being part of the BPTC has changed the way Community Commissioners interact with their own families, friends and communities, indicating a ripple effect of personal growth and transformation. Participants (particularly Community Commissioners) noted improvements in their personal lives, including better listening skills that benefit their children and wider families. Their increased involvement in community projects inspires their children, leading to a more informed outlook among family members (i.e. how to treat people who are homeless).

Sense of community: The sense of camaraderie and mutual support experienced within the commission has bolstered participants self-esteem and provided hope for a better future. The commission was described as part of a 'family' highlighting the importance of belonging and solidarity.

Opportunities for Growth: Involvement in the commission has opened doors to new opportunities for advocacy and positive change within participants' own communities and areas of work. It has also inspired some to pursue further education and training aligned with a passion for social justice and support work. Access to training and learning opportunities including skills development and potential pathways into politics or further education

Impact on Civic Commissioners: Civic Commissioners have gained a deeper understanding of the importance of relationship building and integrating lived experience into their work. They also felt the BPTC helped them to combat against 'compassion fatigue' and finding a renewed passion for their work.

Enhanced Communication Skills: Both civic and Community Commissioners have honed their communication skills through active listening, thoughtful reflection and relational facilitation. They also feel more informed about poverty-related issues, leading to a shift in approach towards emphasising relationship building. These skills have not only improved interactions within the commission but also enriched everyday interactions in their personal and professional lives.

Creating networks: Involvement with the BPTC#2 has led to opportunities to meet new people and get involved in other networks dedicated to poverty justice. Community Commissioners in particular noted their increased involvement in wider community projects, contributing to the betterment of their communities. They have connected individuals and organisations and helped to shape initiatives such as the Ladywood Housing initiative.

Influence: Participants provide numerous examples of shaping and influencing strategies beyond the BPTC, including the NHS, Poverty Truth Network; influencing council and health strategies; involvement in the Economic Justice Action Network; Health Equity Strategy and describe engagement with key stakeholders with whom they have shared insights that influence both policy and practice. Opening doors within institutional settings, particularly in local councils, leading to opportunities for greater influence and impact on policymaking.

7.2 Impact on Civic Leaders

The BPTC#2 Launch, Final and Listening Events have provided opportunities for civic leaders to engage directly with people impacted by poverty. The events were impactful platforms for fostering dialogue and driving change by allowing influential individuals to connect with people affected by poverty and bridge the gap between decision-makers and those most impacted.

Exposure to Lived Experiences: The events provided a platform for civic leaders to hear real-life examples and stories from people experiencing poverty, prompting them to reflect on their approaches and priorities. Civic Commissioners and leaders involved in the events recognise the importance of including people with lived experience of poverty in decision-making processes and the shaping of new strategies and services. The ‘ripple’ effect of BPTC has been their ability to raise awareness among colleagues, policy makers, and the public about the impacts of poverty.

Shift in Perspective: The events confronted decision-makers with the realities of poverty, leading them to consider practical solutions through collaborative problem-solving with individuals who have lived experience. This shift is evident in the example of changes made to food distribution methods based on feedback about pre-packaged food parcels being unsuitable for some recipients.

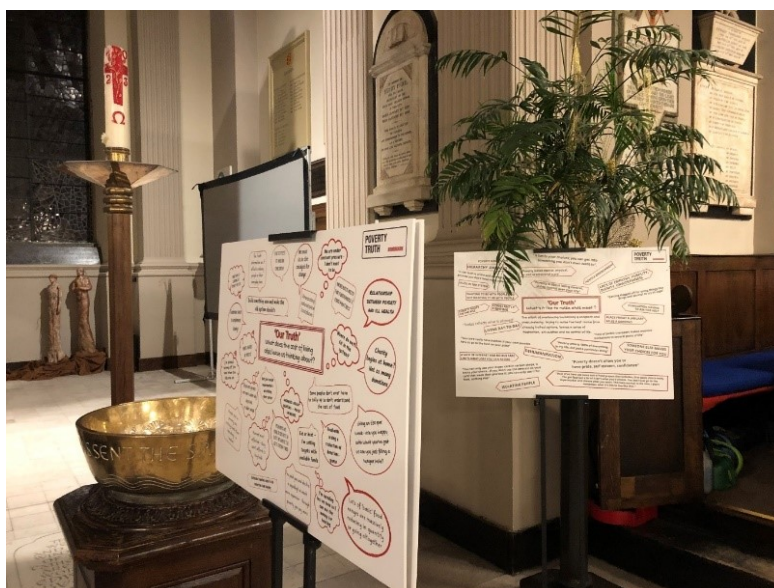
Focus on Local Solutions: Civic leaders recognised the effectiveness of smaller, localised changes based on direct feedback from the events.

Feeling more informed: Civic leaders indicated that they felt more informed about poverty-related issues, leading them to ask different questions when visiting community projects and including considerations of lived experience in all their work. They now emphasise the importance of relationship building over mere consultation and actively seek to include voices that are often marginalised or absent.

Challenges and Observations: Some of the civic leaders we interviewed expressed uncertainty about the concrete outcomes of the Listening Events, despite acknowledging potential long-term relational shifts and changes in decision-making. This highlights the need for clearer communication about anticipated outputs from these events.

7.3 City-wide Impact

‘The impact, the wider impact, you never get to know straight away. It starts off as this snowball that you’ve just flung into the ether, and then, all of a sudden, it becomes this avalanche of, “Well, oh my god, we told them about that like two, three years ago.” Then you see the impact of it, it’s a very slow process. We like to call it slow activism. Yes, it garners its own results straight away, but the widespread feel of it, you don’t feel immediately.’ – Community Commissioner



The BPTC is observed to have had a wide-reaching impact, albeit often gradual and nuanced, on various sectors and initiatives beyond the immediate scope of its sessions and the personal impact on commissioners. In the Ripple Effects Mapping workshop held in March 2024, participants likened this to ‘slow activism’. The over-arching city-wide impact includes:

Emphasis on meaningful engagement with Lived Experience: The commission’s relational approach has influenced decision-making processes within the local authority, encouraging ongoing engagement with

community voices rather than one-off consultations.

Influence on Institutions and organisations: Participants identified some significant changes within organisations adapting their ways of working to align the principles and insights of PTCs (i.e. Joseph Rowntree Foundation). This is seen as a way of informing government policies and is perceived as a growing movement towards more direct and participatory democracy.

Influence on new initiatives and innovations: The commission's influence has led to the development of numerous new initiatives and innovations (see Table 4), such as changes in food bank operations to prioritise meeting dietary and cultural needs with dignity. It has influenced initiatives such as the Warm Welcome Network ensuring that thought is given to non-stigmatisation and dignity of those accessing this support and it has supported new initiatives such as the Economic Justice Action Network.

Language and Approach Shifts: Participants feel there is a notable shift in language and approach within institutions and organisations in the city, towards the principles of dignity and choice. Terms like 'participant' replace stigmatising language like 'beneficiary', reflecting a more respectful and empowering approach. There is a growing awareness of the impact of language and stigma surrounding poverty.

Impact on Policy and Strategy Development: Civic Commissioners have reported incorporating lived experience into various strategies, such as housing and homelessness initiatives, resulting in more inclusive and effective approaches. The BPTC's relational approach has influenced decision-making processes within the local authority, encouraging ongoing engagement with community voices.

Changing Perceptions of Poverty: The definition and understanding of poverty have evolved, leading to a broader recognition of its complexities and the need for more dignified approaches to service delivery and policymaking.

Empathetic and Human-Centred Systems: The BPTC has influenced both definitions and understanding of poverty, and the way that people working across the 'system' talk about people. This move to a more 'human and empathetic' system, which reduces stigma and foregrounds lived experience voice, dignity and participatory democracy is an emerging narrative, consistently advocated by commissioners.

Increased dialogue and advocacy: The BPTC#2 created opportunities for engagement with civic leaders, politicians, and policy makers fostering mutual understanding and collaboration on poverty-related issues. People are actively talking about poverty and solutions, leading to more significant groups of policy makers listening to people talking about the impact of poverty on individuals and communities.

Strengthening Networks and Collaborations: Networks including the Poverty Truth Network and the Economic Justice Action Network are growing and becoming more influential platforms for advocating against poverty. Collaborative efforts such as the Warm Welcome Winter further demonstrate the power of collective action. Expansion of networks beyond BPTC#2, connecting with other organisations, media outlets, and influential figures to amplify voices and advocate for change were evident.

Challenges and observations: Translating the impact of this 'slow activism' was harder for people further removed from the commission. When we interviewed people who had attended listening events for example, they found it difficult to identify the immediate impact. What is important is that the BPTC model is seen to shape conversations, policies and initiatives over the long term.

'I think it did make some change, but it wasn't a revolutionary change because our system is really difficult. It's really difficult to affect an organisational shift.' – Guest

Some examples of specific initiatives and innovations that illustrate the city-wide impact (or potential impact) of the BPTC#2 are detailed in Table 4 below.

Table 4: BPTC#2 City-Wide Engagement and Impact

Initiative	Action/outcome
Poverty & Health – Children & Families	<p>Listening Event#1: This event led to some tangible outcomes. For instance, Tim Boyes, CEO of Birmingham Education Partnership, invited the Commission to participate in the November Education Conference, emphasising the importance of grounding discussions in lived experiences. Additionally, Sue Harrison, Head of Children's Services at Birmingham City Council, shared that Birmingham had joined the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative. This initiative reflects a commitment to incorporating children's rights into local governance and planning. An article was published in the Journal for Paediatrics and Child Health accessible here.</p> <p>The event concluded with participants agreeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a commitment to incorporating the voices of those impacted by poverty in future decision-making processes • a commitment to different approaches to work with dignity, not stigma
'Real People, Real Talk' – A series of 12 sets of 3 conversations hosted by Thrive Together Birmingham and the BPTC#2 Civic Commissioner(s)	BPTC#2 supported 129 residents from across the city to share their experiences with people from the NHS, Birmingham City Council and other organisations developing the Family Hubs Strategy in the city.
'Warm Welcome Network' – Developing the design of the 'warm welcome' approach	<p>Video created to share a BPTC#2 Community Commissioners story, to inform the development of the 'warm welcome' approach.</p> <p>BPTC#2 Involvement in the design and delivery of the warm welcome network.</p> <p><i>Outcome 1: Change of name from 'Heat Banks' to 'warm welcome,</i></p> <p><i>Outcome 2: Development of a charter which commits to dignity and non-stigmatisation in addressing heating and housing issues.</i></p>
Food Poverty	<p>Listening Event #2: The event led to participants reflecting on potential actions and the need for collaborative efforts to create a more just and equitable food system in Birmingham. They highlighted the need to move beyond temporary fixes like food banks and work towards sustainable solutions that prioritise dignity, choice, and access for all.</p> <p>BPTC#2's influence has led to a shift in the way food banks and pantries operate, with a greater emphasis on meeting the dietary and cultural needs of those they serve and on ensuring dignity of people accessing those support services:</p>
Initiative	Action/outcome

<p>Birmingham Housing Strategy</p>	<p>Contribution to design of consultation process in order that the voices of people outside of the mainstream are effectively heard. Attendance at Homelessness Stakeholder event.</p> <p>Listening event#3 - Key takeaways from the reflections included a pervasive sense of powerlessness, the negative impacts of housing on health and well-being, the need for a culture change within the housing system, and the system's current disjointed nature.</p> <p>Members of BPTC#2 worked with representatives of Lovell and their consultant partners to shape and then participate in a Community Conversation during Birmingham Housing Week.</p> <p>This involved people with lived experience of poverty and living in regeneration areas to explore the question 'What does regeneration mean?'</p> <p><i>Outcome: A section on Lived Experience explicitly developed within the housing strategy.</i></p>
<p>National Government: Poverty Strategy Commission</p> <p>Impactful work leading to advising the Government on the value of engaging with individuals with lived experience of poverty</p>	<p>BPTC#2 facilitated a series of four meetings hosted with representative of national Poverty Strategy Commission exploring 'What does the term 'Cost of Living' mean to you?' culminating in conversation with representative of DWP.</p>
<p>Birmingham Economic Justice Action Network</p>	<p>Members of BPTC#2 have been involved alongside representatives from different sectors in Birmingham developing the emergent Economic Justice Action Network (EJAN) which is hosted and supported by Barrow Cadbury Trust.</p> <p>Through this work they have contributed to the design and development of a new coalition exploring how Birmingham's economy might be more equitable particularly for those who currently benefit least.</p>
<p>Health Equity Collaboration</p> <p>Institute of Health Equity and Barnardo's collaboration aimed at reducing health inequities for children and young people that is adopting a BPTC style engagement with children and young people to inform its development.</p>	<p>A Civic Commissioner from BPTC#2 is involved in exploring the issue of Health Equity : over a two-year period up to July 2025. Barnardo's and the Institute of Health Equity, led by Prof Sir Michael Marmot, are partnering to shape the way Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) create health and address health inequalities among children and young people.</p> <p>Outcome 1: <i>This has led to a significant new partnership between the Healthcare Trust and the voluntary and community sector in Birmingham and Solihull exploring how to unlock 10% social value on £1.1 billion of NHS contracts in the region for community benefit.</i></p> <p>Outcome 2: <i>Contribution to frameworks addressing poverty, particularly affecting children, resulting in published reports and practical interventions</i></p>
<p>Initiative</p>	<p>Action/outcome</p>

Poverty Truth Network	<p>Engagement with the national PTN, facilitators providing good practice guidance regarding relationship building and the journey taken with commissioners.</p> <p>Contribution to a project and report relating to in-work poverty (https://www.jrf.org.uk/work/jobs-that-work-paving-the-way-for-good-jobs-through-participatory-co-design)</p>
Spring Housing Association	<p>Awarded small grant of £3000 from the PTN to pilot an approach into 'relational truth to power' approaches within organisations. This is being piloted with Spring Housing Association. The aim of the pilot will be to grow effective lived experience involvement in a Housing Association through adopting a relational approach.</p>
Final Event: Attended by over 60 participants	<p>The event emphasised the need for the BPTC#2's learnings to shape city policies and highlighted the importance of dignity in interactions and policymaking.</p>

8. Conclusions

Process

Overall, we found that the BPTC process is characterised by its humanised approach, focusing on building relationships, creating safe spaces, and promoting equality and inclusivity. Through structured activities and informal interactions, participants are encouraged to share their experiences, ideas and emotions, fostering a collaborative environment for addressing poverty-related issues.

The critical success factors of a PTC 'process' identified through the evaluation of BPTC#2 are:

Facilitator competence: The PTC facilitator(s) play a pivotal role in the successful delivery of a PTC. They require high levels of skills and expertise in relational project delivery and be adept at employing participatory and inclusive techniques.

Facilitator Guidance and Commissioner Ownership: Facilitators should guide and support conversations, while allowing commissioners to steer the direction of their PTC.

Adequate levels of resource for the whole duration of the project: The substantial efforts required outside of the PTC sessions themselves should be recognised, with appropriate resources and time allocation to undertake recruitment (of both Community and Civic Commissioners), ongoing support and relationship building.

Diversity of Commissioners: It is important to consider demographic and experiential factors of Community Commissioners, whilst emphasising meaningful diversity over token representation. Diversity of Civic Commissioners in terms of their area of influence will also increase the impact of PTC.

Commitment of Community and Civic Commissioners: Ongoing commitment to the commission is crucial, and Commissioners should be supported to regularly participate and contribute throughout all phases of the project.

Open Communication: It is important to foster an inclusive environment which encourages all participants to contribute equally.

Emphasis on Storytelling: There should be a focus on storytelling throughout the PTC process, particularly in the first phase but also continuing into the second when Civic Commissioners should also be encouraged to share their stories.

Impact

Our overall view is that the BPTC#2 evidenced considerable success and profound personal impact on those involved as Commissioners. It has demonstrated the utility of a relational model structured on dialogue, empathy and full awareness of power-dynamics and has had a positive impact in both personal and professional development of the commissioners.

In terms of wider impact, we found the BPTC has helped to shape conversations, policies and initiatives across sectors. While the effects may not always be immediately visible, the commission's emphasis on relationship building and genuine, honest, dialogue has laid the groundwork for lasting change and innovation across the city in addressing poverty and social injustice. The critical success factors of a PTC's 'impact' identified through the evaluation of BPTC#2 are:

Engagement of Civic Commissioners: It is vitally important to have engaged and committed Civic Commissioners who can use their positions of power and influence to promote and advocate the PTC activities.

Opportunities for wider engagement: The launch event, the Listening Events and the Final events had significant impact, enabling the BPTC#2 to engage with a wider range of stakeholders in a meaningful way.

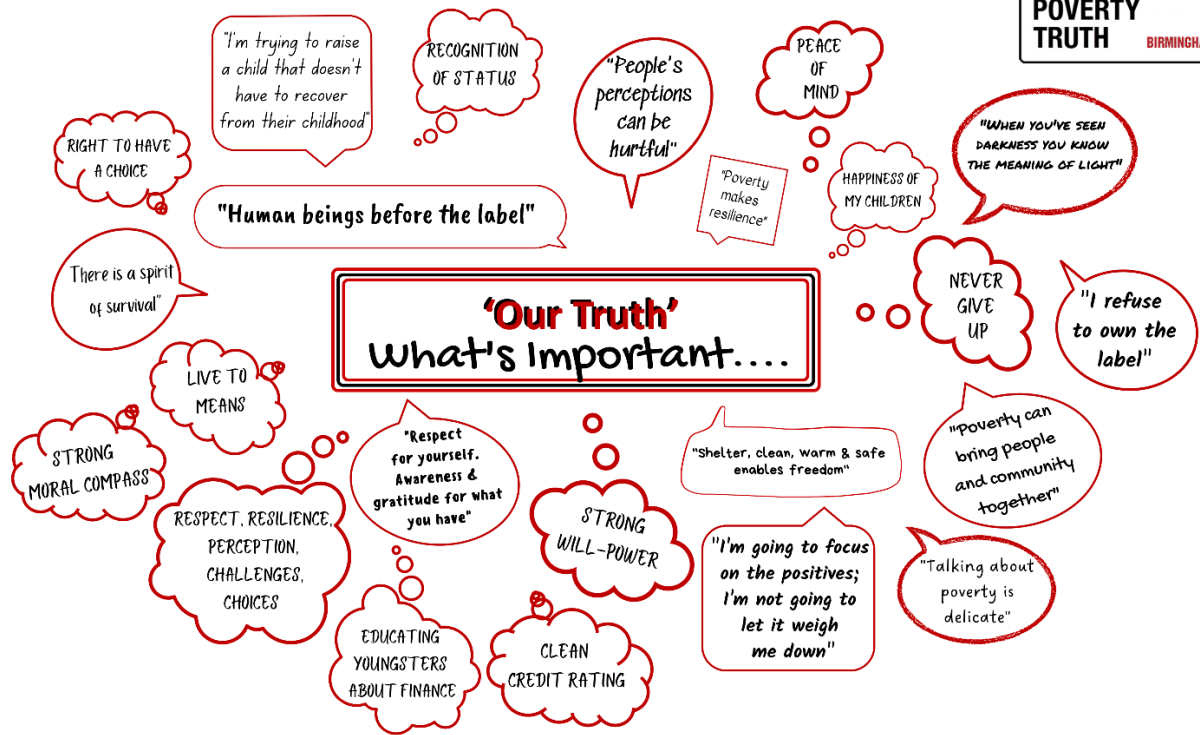
Opportunities to engage in specific city-wide strategies: The examples of specific initiatives included in Table 4, illustrate the potential impact of involving PTCs at a strategic level. These are vital to ensuring that the PTC is effective in incorporating lived experience voice into strategies.

In addition, on a national level, Thrive have been approached by the National Poverty Truth Commission to continue to work in partnership with them as they deliver their emerging 5 to 10 year strategy by:

- Helping them build a national network of Poverty Truth Commission alumni
- Promoting understanding and use of Poverty Truth Commission practices to build the influence of the approach nationally
- Establishing a regional Poverty Truth Hub to promote and support delivery of PTCs around the Midlands
- Contributing to 'change narratives' by emphasising the importance of hearing the voices of those who struggle against poverty

Recommendations

1. We found that for BPTC#2 recruitment was a crucial and time-consuming process. We recommend that any future initiative like a PTC devotes substantial time and resource to planning and delivering recruitment in a way that is sensitive and as un-tokenistically representative as possible. The notion of commissioners that "*look like [Any town]*" is a good one.
2. Good facilitation is key to the success of a Poverty Truth Commission, as demonstrated by BPTC#2. Some participants highlighted challenges with the rigidity of the communication methods used. We recommend that there are more opportunities for dialogue to be open and adaptive, allowing for the differing communication needs of participants.
3. The PTC model is particularly powerful for 'humanising' and directly bringing lived experience to bear on complex system change, strategy (development?) and culture change. We recommend therefore that PTC or future similar models particularly aim to capture and build on this central 'transformative' and impactful insight.
4. We found that the commission's emphasis on relationship building, and genuine dialogue has laid the groundwork for lasting change and innovation across the city. However, we recommend that any future PTC or similar builds intrinsic mechanisms into the programme from the start based on principles of co-enquiry, co-design, and co-production, so that community commissioners (or equivalents), are actively empowered to engage in system re-design. This could also include finding ways to provide opportunities for BPTC alumni to engage with front-line staff as well as strategic.
5. As well as local, BCC-wide impact, we believe the BPTC#2 demonstrates the need to enhance the sharing of learning with National PTN, further develop good practice, and highlight successes and challenges. We recommend continuing to compare and contrast the experiences of PTCs in other places, possibly under the aegis of the Poverty Truth Network.
6. Finally, at a broader level again, the PTC model is still not widely known, especially in the light of other, and similarly deep citizen engagement mechanisms such as participatory budgeting and citizens juries. We therefore recommend continued efforts should be made to promote the model to policymakers and practitioners, particularly showcasing examples of tangible changes in policy, or highlighting the 'ripples' of the model's influence on people and systems.



research@bvsc.org

Birmingham Voluntary Service Council, Latham House, 33-34 Paradise Street,
Birmingham B1 2AJ

www.bvsc.org



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