Declaring a Poverty Emergency

"COVID-19 has deepened existing inequalities, hitting the poorest and most vulnerable communities the hardest. It has put a spotlight on economic inequalities and fragile social safety nets that leave vulnerable communities to bear the brunt of the crisis. At the same time, social, political and economic inequalities have amplified the impacts of the pandemic. On the economic front, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased global unemployment and dramatically slashed workers' incomes." **Goal 10, Reduced Inequalities (UN Sustainable Development Goals).**

There is a large and growing body of evidence that highlights the disproportionate impact on low income communities as a result of recent global recessions and the COVID-19 pandemic.

For low income and non-earning residents in our Borough, income-based inequalities that pre-date COVID-19 have been further exposed and greatly exacerbated by these crises, the impact of which is yet to be fully realised. As this situation continues to unfold, and daily redundancies reach the thousands across the UK, Public Health England are reporting that those on the lowest incomes have suffered more than double the infection and mortality rates of those within the more financially stable or wealthier parts of the Borough and Country.[1] It is becoming clear that poverty is the key defining factor in how people experience the social and economic impacts of this pandemic in their lives, yet those struggling on the lowest incomes have the least influence in shaping and influencing our approach to recovery.

We have an opportunity in how we plan our Recovery, firstly to give true recognition to those low-income workers who have kept our country running while many of us were in lockdown or isolating at home, but also to create a lasting legacy of change, where poverty is not inevitable in our society and where fairer, greener and stronger communities can emerge.

In declaring a Poverty Emergency, this Council recognises that this is the time for that change. By aligning this work with our Climate Emergency declaration in 2019, this Council commits to a People and Planet approach to Recovery and Renewal which encompasses:

i.   **Prioritising People and Planet** Identifying where the environmental and poverty agendas overlap in order to tackle common issues of inequality, health and wellbeing.

ii.   **Recognising Socio-Economic Deprivation as an equalities issue** Acknowledging that the stress of being poor and in crisis has a detrimental impact on health, including mental health and wellbeing, achievement, life chances, participation, resilience and social cohesion.

iii.   **Investing in 'Levelling Up' locally** Working with residents to understand the barriers to employment, housing, health, leisure or education, and investing locally to level up our Borough's communities.

iv.   **Embedding Lived Experience** Building on the foundations of the Poverty Truth Commissions, to reach out to people affected by poverty and use their experience to develop better policies and services which respond to their needs.

v.   **Building stronger communities** Continuing to work with the network of groups involved in the community response and other local initiatives, to increase participation in local democracy and involve people in the decisions that affect their lives. Providing a means for new groups to meet and build confidence, to collaborate, educate, experience a sense of ownership and influence and to build democratic participation, in order to root necessary responses within the heart of low-income communities.

vi.   **Unlocking Community Wealth and Potential** Developing further council strategies around community wealth building, including supporting communities to consider routes to community ownership in order to create jobs and share local wealth. Fostering the education, awareness, skills and culture-shift at all levels that provide the precursor to meaningfully explore and expand community ownership as a route out of poverty and forward through the crisis.

vii.   **Working together** Growing a network of local academics, professionals, unions, those with expertise in supporting migrants and asylum seekers and with existing and emerging poverty-related grassroots community groups and a wider network of people with lived-experience to support our work.

viii. **Expanding our evidence-base** Collating more detailed poverty-related data in order to better inform the local and national approach.

ix. **Starting with ourselves** Ensuring that our staff and those within our council companies are paid at least a local living wage will make us an example to others, helping to expand our local living wage Borough status. Through this and the implementation of a social value policy we can create inclusive growth in our Borough, in partnership with our suppliers, contractors and commissioned services.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

1. Formally acknowledge the rising levels of poverty so widely evidenced over the past decade and further exacerbated by the dual crises of pandemic and recession.
2. Identify, report on and address unfair socio-economic barriers to democratic participation, security and wellbeing wherever they exist.
3. Ensure that the Poverty Emergency workstream sits alongside all other workstreams within the council's recovery planning.
4. Develop a Poverty Emergency Strategy which takes a People and Planet approach to helping residents in our borough cope which aims to remedy the disproportionate social and economic impacts of the pandemic and recession.
5. Continue to streamline and widely publicise access routes to advocacy and support for those directly impacted by the crisis and facing homelessness and unemployment/underemployment
6. Work collaboratively with partners to provide space for community-led 'hubs' where solutions to low income and crisis impacts can be explored by local residents and support provided
7. Keep the disproportionate impacts of the crisis on low income communities at the forefront of our response to planning, housing, land allocation and development including our response to recent legislative changes
8. Develop a dedicated online space for sharing of good practice, networking with other councils and providing a platform for the Leader's Champion and an interface for collaboration with those directly impacted
9. Support the Leader's Champion for Poverty and Inequality to lead on this work, assisted by the cross-party Poverty Truth Advisory Board (PTAB) and a wide network of residents with lived experience.
10. Take a collaborative and evidence-based approach, working more closely with health, universities, trade unions and poverty-related community groups to improve our research and intelligence
11. Use what we learn through the work of the Poverty Emergency to raise the voices of those affected by poverty to help inform the government to shape and deliver their 'Levelling Up' agenda in our Borough and sub-region.
12. Invite other Councils to join with us in declaring a Poverty Emergency as a vehicle for systemic change in our society.
13. To share through networks like the LGA, our model for declaring a Poverty Emergency alongside a Climate Emergency as best practice in recovery and renewal.

Notes:
1. Public Health England report: Disparities in the Risk and Outcomes of COVID-19 June 2020