'How do you get by?'

Voices of Leicester and Leicestershire

Bishop's Commission on Poverty

Diocese of **Leicester**

Contents

"How do you get by?"

Bishop's Foreword

Poverty is both personal and depersonalising. Living in poverty is a searing experience where people are so often relegated to numbers in a system. In preparing this report, we learned of fear and of time-consuming preoccupations with the struggle just to survive. But we also learned of hope and of a desire for the Church, in partnership with others including those who experience poverty, to step up and take action to make a difference. The stories and suggestions which have shaped this report have emerged out of direct experience. They are humbling, and we should take them seriously.

The background is that the Synod of the Diocese of Leicester debated issues of poverty in 2013 and invited me to set up a Commission to look at these in our diocese and recommend ways in which the churches could respond. This report is the consequence of that decision. It is intentionally short in order to reach as many people as possible, but fuller accounts are available on the Diocesan website.

The report has been brought together to reflect the voice and the views of those who live in some of our poorest neighbourhoods. I believe it reflects accurately how poverty extends beyond the material experience, and how it can isolate people and generate fear. I believe it can help us to understand why many people find themselves in extremely precarious circumstances through no fault of their own. We examined statistics, and fully recognise their importance, but kept returning to stories of personal pain and hardship.

Recently we have been reminded of the huge dependence by many people on food banks, including a large proportion of those who are in work but cannot earn enough to pay the bills and feed their families. Christians inevitably must challenge the widening gap between the rich and the poor and must argue that the market cannot determine whether some have enough means to feed themselves and maintain a basic standard of living.

The Bible makes it clear how central to faith is how we relate to one another and to the most vulnerable in society. I hope individuals and community groups will not only read this report carefully but will consider how it may be inviting them to respond. I am very aware that our report coincides with the debates which will be taking place in the run up to the General Election. No one political party has all the answers to these questions. Nor can any political party claim the exclusive moral high ground. But we all can and should consider effective and ethical ways forward.

People of faith have a responsibility to think, pray and seek to understand these issues. But we also have a responsibility to take practical action to respond to the needs of those who are living with poverty in our own neighbourhoods, communities and parishes. The launch of this report just before the season of Lent presents a particular opportunity for Christians to refocus priorities and to reconsider responsibilities.

This is not, however, just a project for a few weeks in a season, but has the potential to become the building blocks for sustained engagement. If the churches were to develop a reputation for being at the very forefront of society's response to those in need, then indeed we shall be heard to be proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God. What more important thing could we do together than that?

Context

>> **Leicester ranks high on measures of poverty and deprivation, with some of the poorest and most deprived wards in the country. Its population is relatively young and child poverty is particularly high**

The Diocese of Leicester is a place of dramatic contrasts. To the north, the edge of the Leicestershire and South Derbyshire coalfields and the urban landscape of Loughborough. Travelling south, a rolling landscape of villages and market towns with rich and varied histories including manufacturing industries and the deeply rural and sparsely populated Vale of Belvoir. At the centre sits the richly multi-cultural and multi-faith city of Leicester.

The Church's mission and ministry must therefore be varied in expression and delivery and this is reflected in operational structures. In local communities, in different contexts, the Church provides both presence, resource and action. At Diocesan level there is strong leadership and engagement with matters way beyond traditionally understood 'churchy' concerns.

In terms of local government, the Diocese is almost co-terminus with the City, under a unitary authority, and the County with county, district and parish councils. The Commission noted that although these boundaries need to be recognised, language that divides City and County can be unhelpful, not least because the urban footprint is much larger than the City, and peoples' lives do not follow ward boundaries or city limits. This Commission recommends the use of 'us' as implying the people of City, County and Diocese.

Leicester ranks high on measures of poverty and deprivation, with some of the poorest and most deprived wards in the country. Its population is relatively young and child poverty is particularly high.

In contrast Leicestershire overall is one of the least deprived counties, but it still has pockets of deprivation. These are comparatively small in terms of population, but are still recognisable places where hardship is experienced, notably in some towns. In rural areas affluence and poverty exist side by side, and the poverty of isolation is an issue.

This Commission was mindful of these clear contrasts from the start and therefore of the need to dig below the statistics to capture the real experience of people living in poverty. These 'voices from poverty', combined with statistics that paint a general picture of the diocese, present the challenge facing us. Both the experiences of poverty and practical responses in the city, the towns and in rural areas may be different, but the effects are equally crippling on individuals and families.

Diocesan Synod set the task: 'To bring forward recommendations, which are rooted in our understanding of the Gospel, for the Diocese, Deaneries and parishes to respond to the challenges facing Britain.' It was envisaged from the start that the Commission's final report would provide analysis, including a variety of evidence and data, with individual stories, and make clear recommendations for action by the Church, both at Diocesan and local level and with potential partners.

A number of potential stakeholders provided evidence which features in this report. As the work developed, it became increasingly shaped by the evidence received; but initially the Commission took as identifiable starting points for their explorations the causes and effects of poverty, including the effect upon families, understanding where and among whom poverty is to be encountered and the isolation of poverty and its connections with other related concerns. They also felt it important to examine the nature and structures of local provision in addressing identified issues, and local capacity and capacity building.

This was considered alongside recent changes in the welfare system, the application of sanctions and the transfer of Social Fund monies to local authorities. The Commission also examined the plight of individuals, those with mental health issues, those with disabiliities and the women who carry much of the burden of poverty and the management of diminishing resources.

We understood, early on, the truism that how you define or measure what you are investigating will materially affect the outcomes of your investigation. While recognising statistical analysis will be a useful tool in pushing action forward,

we did not 'home in' on highly-detailed studies, and took a more holistic sense of poverty than a straightforwardly numerical definition. We took as our starting point the Church Urban Fund's understandings - poverty of resources, poverty of relationships and poverty of identity.

At the first meeting, the Bishop expressed the hope that the Commission would attend to questions of understanding and responding, with both a local focus and a practical outcome. It was noted that some Churches want to develop networks and, as part of their core mission, tap into what is available and possible. But also the Church can just act as a 'safety valve' for an unjust system, with ageing congregations leading to a tendency to engage others in service on our behalf, fundraising rather than direct encounter - food banks being an exception. Therefore part of the Commission's aim was to encourage and enable Church communities to be more proactive by increasing their awareness and ability to re-engage with people experiencing poverty.

This introduction started with the statement that the Diocese of Leicester was a place of dramatic contrasts – and this Commission found that there are none more stark and urgent than the contrast between those people experiencing the ordeal of poverty and the rest of the population who live more comfortable lives.

When the Poverty Commission went to work, we knew that those living in poverty faced a difficult struggle. But we did not expect to uncover the uniformly grim reality described in this document. We did not expect to hear such moving accounts of the fear, isolation, shame and despair that poverty brings. We did not expect to hear about the impact on physical and mental health – and we had not anticipated the loss of identity caused by gruelling rounds of housing, benefits and other support agencies.

The Commission was clear that the voices of people experiencing hardship should be heard. We did not wish to discuss or write about people without hearing directly what they have to say. We noted, for example, the power of the 'Voices of Britain' project.

Our findings bore this out: the raw human burden of poverty was best articulated by those who experience it first-hand.

The discussions of a focus group convened in Braunstone, one of the more deprived areas of Leicester, were crucial to our work. We used Open Space Technology to allow issues and questions to emerge from the floor. Detailed feedback from this session forms the basis of one of the on-line appendices.

Other evidence was collected from group discussions among professionals, individual interviews and visits to significant locations, where known work among those affected was already in place. Here we experienced passion and concern, in a desire to alleviate hardship and bring about lasting change. Feedback from these activities is also available in the on-line appendices. Unfortunately web-requests for stories or thoughts yielded no return; but it was possible to talk to a number of different faith leaders and to visit a local gurdwara, thus gaining some sense of the diversity of expressions of poverty in this most multi-cultural city.

As the introductory chapter indicates, the study has been conducted against a national backdrop of increased levels of deprivation, changes in legislation and the benefits system and the effects of financial uncertainties. Commission members were conscious that other studies have been undertaken and key findings from them have also been considered as part of our work, in particular the Leicester Child Poverty Commission (2013). A summary of these appears in the on-line appendices.

The report has been structured around emergent themes from the body of evidence. Despite an initial sense of areas for exploration, there was, nonetheless, no pre-conceived idea of what might be dominant threads. As a result, all we were told and discovered started to crystallise into some common areas of concern.

Comments and cameo case studies from real people and situations brought these issues alive. They form the core substance of the report, providing clear challenges for the Church along with other faith and community groups, but also a sense that here is important work to be done. The challenge is to convert this into action at community level.

This report can only be a snapshot at a moment in time. It would be arrogant to assume we have identified problems and now present solutions, when changes in the economy, legislation and patterns of work and family life mean that things are never static and that we must be responsive to changing circumstances on an ongoing basis. There can be no question of solving the problem, doing the work and then moving on to something entirely different. Actions put in place now, as a result of this work, must be effective and sustainable if we are going to be able to make a real difference in the long term.

There are an estimated 26,000 children living in poverty in Leicester and more than 16,000 in Leicestershire

"How do you get by?"

Poverty has many faces

Clarity at the start

The Commission recognised from the start the need to be clear about what it was investigating.

Members knew use of the term 'poverty' could be problematic – with those experiencing its effects seeing it as a label, implying a lack of worth and carrying with it a stigma.

Also, we still often understand poverty in more 'absolute' terms, associated with images of developing countries. (One participant originally from a 'developing country', having now lived in England for nine years, raised the question what we might mean by a 'developed country'). Nevertheless the Commission believed poverty must be understood in the context of the culture and living standards enjoyed by the majority in our own society. Given the evidence of the very real hardship caused by 'relative' poverty and its belief that poverty should shame society rather than those suffering it, the Commission felt it was right to continue to use the word poverty.

"Society may be more interested in farmers in Africa than in our own village."

Commission members noted poverty is a politicised concept and that there has been considerable debate recently about how it should be defined and measured. It was also noted that all too often definitions and measures are confused. So, for example, the most commonly accepted benchmark refers to people living below 60% of the median national income. This is a measure, not a definition. While it is useful in tracking trends and making cross-national comparisons, it doesn't of itself capture the experience of poverty.

Who experiences poverty?

Early on the Commission asked itself how people fall into poverty, noting that evidence from food banks suggests increasing turbulence in peoples' lives causes movement in and out of financial hardship. Therefore, in the context of this research, it may not be helpful or accurate to view those in poverty as a distinct group or groups within the

wider population. It was also noted that there is 'hidden' poverty. It is also important to take account of the way the distribution of poverty and attitudes towards it differ between different ethnic groups.

A useful framework

Having recognised that there is neither one single definition of poverty, nor a 'right' one, and having affirmed this Commission's desire to take a holistic approach, it was decided to use as a working framework for investigations the three-stranded understanding of poverty articulated by the Church Urban Fund's briefing, "The web of Poverty".

Poverty of resources - when people lack sufficient resources, such as income, skills, qualifications or health, to achieve a good standard of living. Where resources are limited, so are people's choices and opportunities.

Poverty of relationships - when people lack the strong and supportive relationships on which individual, family and community life are built, resulting in loneliness and isolation. Where

We're whole people - not a collection of statistics or issues

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Some communities believe God has willed this. There is surrender

relationships are under pressure or where communities are fragmented and hostile, it is difficult to thrive in human terms.

Poverty of identity – when people lack a strong sense of self-worth and a belief in their own ability to respond to challenges. Where these are missing, it can lead to low self-esteem, a lack of resilience and aspiration, poor mental health and even drug and alcohol misuse.

Let us not forget that poverty of material resources does not necessarily translate into poverty of relationships. Some people living in material poverty enjoy the support of very strong social networks. But their relationships with the wider society can often be impoverished as a result of disdainful treatment, which can make them feel shamed and humiliated. This, in turn, can be a cause of the 'poverty of identity' identified by the CUF.

'We're whole people - not a collection of statistics or issues."

Participants' perspectives

Most participants in this study preferred to describe the signs and effects of poverty rather than define it. Almost without exception they recognised that poverty encompasses far more than financial definitions. Contributors discussed poverty without pinning it down tightly, recognising its multiple facets, but also understanding that financial hardship forms a core starting point. People working among those experiencing poverty demonstrated a welcome breadth of awareness, recognising unhappiness and not coping, isolation and loneliness as facets of poverty. They noted that within society there are broad brush perceptions of poverty and those experiencing poverty, which fail to take into account a huge range of differing circumstances.

Virtually all participants identified the need to help the public understand much more about poverty issues - especially among those whose work or activities are among people. Media portrayal and public rhetoric was felt to have resulted in stigmatising, stereotyping, blame and shame. For example, those who worked among farmers spoke of peoples'

perceptions of the countryside as the urban person's playground, and how society thinks it knows but actually easily misunderstands the farming world. One group mentioned travellers, another people with mental issues. The demographic of where people can afford to live can exacerbate this lack of understanding - essentially rural children attending city schools, for example, or villages without a good population mix. The elderly in a community may have had very different work and lifestyle experiences from those among whom they live.

We are not called to judge the worthiness or unworthiness of the poor. We are called to perform the works of mercy without thought of reward. We should take the condition of the poor as our responsibility. We should learn from their condition because that is the condition of Christ.
(Gustavo Gutierrez - Early Essays)

Beware the label

It was also clear from the start that evidence from food banks and elsewhere suggests increasing economic insecurity causes frequent movement in and out of poverty. Therefore it may not be helpful or accurate to view those in poverty as a distinct group or groups within the wider population. We also found 'hidden' poverty, for example, among women where resources are not shared fully within families. Patterns of and attitudes towards poverty may differ between ethnic groups, which the Commission wanted to take into account.

"Don't put a person in a box."

The Commission liked the idea of using the question 'How do you get by?' as a starting point in gathering evidence. This was both a way of avoiding the label 'poverty' when talking to people suffering hardship, and also an acknowledgement that, for all the constraints they face, they are agents in their own lives and not simply passive victims.

Cultural nuances

One group of participants explored how faith shapes people's attitudes towards poverty. People with a deep belief in destiny may have a fatalistic attitude towards their situation. Some will see their hardship as

the will of God, and therefore potentially surrender to it, to the extent that those who may wish to help by challenging this attitude are seen as not promoting true faith. Where these are issues, the way forward was felt to be through dialogue and a basket of different solutions, rather than to impose a limited selection of potentially culturally alien solutions. Different communities have different attitudes and solutions with regard to the lending of money, for example. Misunderstandings may arise, but these participants felt sharing of issues and provision to be beneficial, with huge capacity for communities to learn from one another.

"Some communities believe God has willed this. There is surrender."

What is need?

One key question for participants was: 'What defines need?' It was accepted that a purely numerical definition of poverty may assume a threshold income level. But this fails to take into account multiple lifestyle factors including location, relationships, health and a range of other practical issues. Many of these are relatively unknown to people who have not experienced poverty. For example a lack of regular and reliable access to the internet inhibits applications, potentially easier and cheaper shopping and the use of financial services. While a roof is a fundamental need, lack of housing stability brings with it other insecurities, including relationship and isolational poverty.

"What if we have no close friends and don't know our neighbours?"
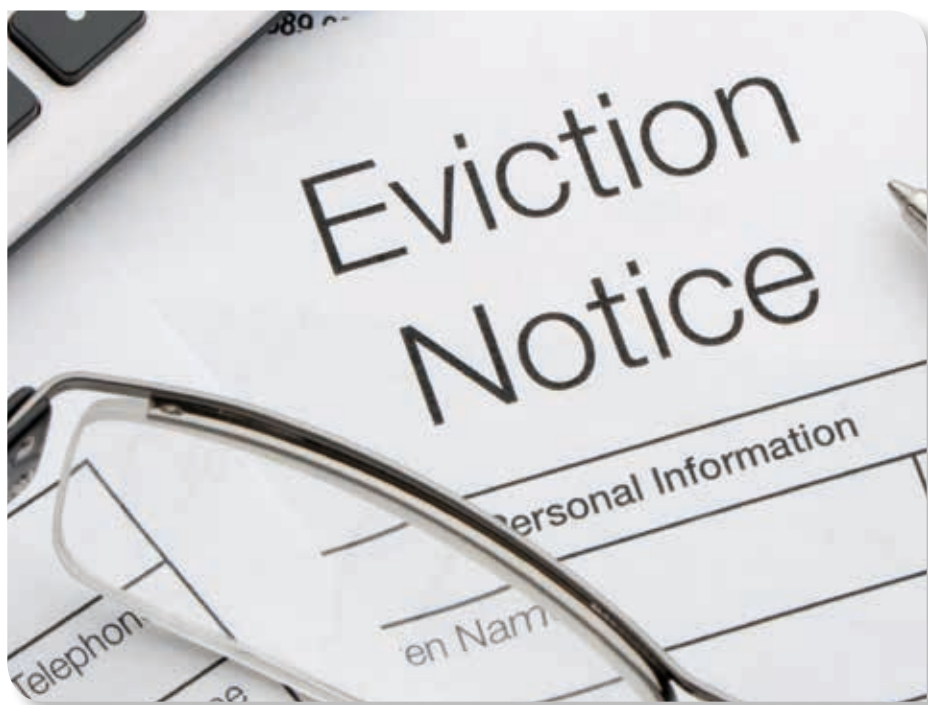
What it feels like to be poor

> **She stopped going to church for a year as she couldn't afford the MOT on the car**

Trying to exist

It would perhaps be easy for someone with no experience of a life lived in poverty to believe that the overriding concern of those so affected was simply to get money. But the more this Commission spoke to those in poverty and those working to support them, the more we heard about the multiplicity of afflictions that travel with the condition.

"Not just different needs but a whole life."

It seems that lack of money is just the first of a series of 'plagues' that arrive, sometimes all at once, sometimes one after the other, but all feeding into a general feeling of helplessness, anger, shame, loneliness and, ultimately, exhaustion.

"It's difficult to say what you need - sometimes you just don't know."

We heard people speak passionately about how poverty can undermine self-confidence to the point where it seems impossible to stand up for yourself, to apply for jobs, to put your case to officials and to articulate your predicament.

"Every day trying to cope - trying to exist."

The invisibility of poverty

People described how a cycle of frustrating contact with 'the system' had left them feeling virtually invisible, a non-person. They were reduced to just the particular one of their problems being discussed, with no apparent desire or ability on the part of the system to see them as a whole person.

"I don't matter."

They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do. Galatians 2:10

For some the shame that came with running out of money led them to shy away from friends and relatives in an attempt to hide the problem. That, inevitably, compounded their feelings of isolation and loneliness. This was a particular problem for those who had only recently fallen into poverty and thus still had all the outward appearance of being 'normal' as opposed to being 'poor'.

Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty. (Mother Theresa)

A sense of fear

At some point in this downward spiral into despair, people start to fear. Fear was one of the most talked about aspects of what it was like to experience poverty. Sometimes it was the fear of the knock on the door that signalled a visit from the bailiffs. At other times there was the fear of the landlord calling for the rent, or the fear that the letter dropping through the letterbox was another unpayable bill or a further demand for interest on a loan taken out in desperation. Then there was the sense of fear waiting for something to go wrong - expecting payback even if things were, at that moment, going better.

"I still start when I hear a knock on the door…"

Of course, for those with children, these emotions were amplified to a desperate extent. The whole household is affected by the condition of poverty, not just in the most obvious practical things like enough to eat, basic toiletries and items of personal hygiene, decent clothes and warm rooms, but in the overall feelings of shame, fear, isolation and stigmatisation. Parents fear an inability to feed their children, and try to protect them from the trauma. This brings pressure, wanting to appear to cope and to avoid any sign of weakness.

"It's being so isolated and being so afraid. I am afraid my landlord will throw us out. I'm afraid to complain about the repairs. I am afraid of not being able to feed my son. It all just kind of gradually builds up on you."

The emotional toll

For many, the decline brings with it a collapse in health. There is a clear and well documented link between deprivation in all its forms and poor health – and in particular mental health. A significant number of people at the Commission's group sessions talked openly about their battle with emotional problems, the challenge of getting proper help from a system under pressure and the added stress that created in all their other dealings to try to break out of the poverty trap.

'The Job Centre is not set up for people with mental health problems."

" I think of suicide every day

A Leicester resident

One individual cannot do all those things. We are lacking a network of people that will listen to your whole history, your whole story, and to try and put things in place that will support your whole story, rather than 'you just don't fit in our box'.

Am I really only going to get help if I am self-harming, if I do go bonkers and kill someone? Is that what they are telling me to do? They are telling me to go get a life, do they not realise that is what I have been trying to do.

Everything that we try to apply for – and it's hard enough to know what you are entitled to – you are expected to go to places and tell them what you need. My whole life was unravelling. I did not know what I needed. I am on my own and I don't know who to talk to. When I went to the CAB the lady there said I should volunteer there as I knew so much. But I didn't feel I was equipped to do anything.

You go to places and they say 'oh no, we don't deal with that here' – or 'it would be ok if you didn't have five children' – so what do I do with them? Sell one? Rent one out? They say, because we could help you if you were like this – but I'm not like that. Or they say they could help if I had that problem, but I don't, I have other problems.

If you don't answer the questions that they present to you in the right way for them to say, "oh yes we can do this this and this," they don't know what to do with you. We need somebody just to listen and to have the time to listen not just to one individual need. We all have an individual need. We have a life that is unravelling and often through no fault of our own. We need people to listen to us and say we can put things in place for this or this.

I don't want to have a black mark against my name because if I have to rent somewhere they will think I am a bad tenant.

The powerlessness of poverty

> " Tenants with no voice are powerless

Not just a statistic

The experience of poverty brings with it a whole catalogue of challenges – but probably none so destructive as the loss of self. The Commission heard again and again of the de-humanising effect of having to endure a succession of interviews, assessments and meetings where a system under constant stress struggles to see 'clients' as more than a number or a benefit statistic. Preconceived perception of need was felt to be an issue.

"They just want to you to answer the questions: they smile and send you on your way."

People in poverty described how they ended up feeling less and less like a whole person and more and more just a cypher, re-referred again and again, 'pushed around' and generally devalued. Strong comment was made that those 'with power' need to hear about the fear and invisibility.

"People feel worked on from the top."

This 'institutional exclusion' is not because the staff working in Job Centres and benefits offices don't care, but because there are so many people seeking help that the system itself is almost forced to see claimants and those with problems as a series of cases and numbers.

The difficulties of form-filling exemplify the institutional exclusion and devaluing of the individual. Fill in the form incorrectly and it is rejected. Yet the forms are often complex and inaccessible, both physically if you don't have easy internet access and also in terms of understanding what is required.

"You can't get it right filling in forms - what's the point?"

For the needy shall not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the poor perish forever.
Psalm 9:18

No voice

"Actually look at the person in need and ask them."

This sense of being nothing more than a statistic compounds the already-identified issues of shame, fear and humiliation for people living in poverty. At the group sessions organised by the Commission we heard repeated desire for voices to be heard and for people to be helped in expressing their concerns and aspirations. This is particularly true for people with mental health issues.

"It's difficult to complain – you don't want a 'black mark.'"

*Susan's grandson

Grandma Susan worries about her grandson. He is 23. He has ended up sleeping on a friend's sofa because he finds it impossible to live at home with Mum and stepdad. He tried living in a flat, but with the gas and electric meters gobbling £50 a week, he wasn't able to eat properly. He could move in with his girlfriend, but that would affect his benefit payments – and that would make his money problems even worse. He cannot find a job and this depresses him. He has sought advice, but this has proved less than helpful. Susan herself only has a modest income and feels powerless to help him. She feels her grandson is trapped.

* Pseudonym

"How do you get by?"

The so-called 'bedroom tax' evoked strong feelings through its ability to turn lives upside down - sometimes rather arbitrarily. Having to move house can break up support networks and impact on families and the elderly. It can bring with it a raft of practical problems, especially if available properties are limited.

"Tenants with no voice are powerless."

Do not rob the poor because they are poor.
Proverbs 22:22

Advocates and mentors are in short supply, yet could do a great deal both to give voice to the voiceless but also to raise awareness of poverty with politicians and other decision-makers, who, many of those in poverty believe, also struggle to see them as humans and not numbers. Anger was expressed at politicians making judgments about those whose lives they know little about.

"LISTEN!"

"The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase; and in the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us."
(Pope Francis Evangelii Gaudium 54)

"
Those with power need to hear about the fear

The Church's role

> "
> **Churches can offer enthusiasm and emotional resources. Churches can see people as people."**

Is there a role?

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Luke 4: 18-19

People experiencing poverty generally welcomed the intervention of the Commission. But, while recognising the Church already does a great deal, they also wanted to see the Church doing more. They saw the Church not only as being able to provide support at local level, but also with the national stature to raise awareness, work with other faith groups and bring more focus to bear on the plight of those in poverty.

There were some reservations, however. Not everyone would see the Church as neutral and if it were to become more socially active in the ways suggested through this Commission, it would need to be very articulate, transparent and clear about its motives. It was said that the Church needs to rebuild trust to become trustworthy - not least because people don't trust politicians!

"The Church has become tarnished through its involvement with Wonga."

Commission members ran a very useful focus group with workers in several agencies, statutory and voluntary. While participants rarely commented in detail on any potential role for the Church, there was, overall, a strong sense that the Church could play a critical role, both strategically and at a local level. Some felt voiceless, and for them, the Church is seen as a neutral place, neither local government nor a specialist interest or lobby group, able to broker honest conversations and with the leverage to bring people together to discuss issues and plan possible action. For others the Church is seen as one of the focal points of a community, very well placed in terms of buildings and network to be able to grow local initiatives.

A listening Church

It became clear that the Church needs to listen much harder to those facing poverty. The Commission's work was a good example of such listening, but participants pointed out that such listening had not always been their experience. At all levels, the Church needs to ask itself whether we connect naturally and easily with those pushed to the edges of society.

One positive outcome of the Commission might be to help local churches, both in and outside areas of deprivation, to listen deeply to these and other voices. Even in the voicing of fears, space was opened up to explore possible solutions. We may have something to offer, but we also have a lot to receive and learn.

"Poverty can teach us to appreciate what we have; poverty forces us to look at living economically; poverty challenges us to turn a threat into an opportunity."

A listening Church can enable the sharing

Experiences at a lunch club

"Poverty is not just about food and money," said one diner. "A lot of people are isolated." They were talking at the weekly lunch club, tucking into a tasty meal of pasta and salad at the modest price of 50p. People talked about the sense of being stuck and frustrated. The lunch club was run by locals for locals and it provided a real opportunity for people of all ages and situations to get out, socialise and enjoy a good meal. Some talked - others preferred quietly to eat and listen. Three generations of one family sat together, opposite an elderly dementia sufferer and her carer - all regular attenders. People talked about how the Tudor centre, where the lunch club meets, provides a "'real centre" for a variety of activities including bingo and computing skills. The carer spoke movingly about needs - both she and the dementia sufferer needing to meet and interact with others and there being few opportunities so to do. Other elderly people too, many of whom have lived locally for quite some years. The lunch club management and clientele appeared a vibrant and varied cross-section of life in that neighbourhood - the service offered was holistic, invitational and invaluable.

"How do you get by?"

of good practice. It can offer to broker real listening between those facing poverty and the agencies set up to help them. We believe there is good will in at least some agencies to engage on trusted neutral ground with people who might have some uncomfortable truths to tell.

An hospitable Church

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:2

One of the most striking aspects of the group sessions was simply being able to talk to people and share experience. While the Commission learned what it was like living on the breadline, those in that situation found support through engaging with their comrades in adversity. Participants expressed a willingness to make a small contribution to enable such a group to continue. Similarly the hospitality provided to the focus group of workers from different agencies was clearly appreciated, with participants also wanting to remain in touch.

'To be in a group, chatting, you realise you are not on your own'

Both situations illustrate the potential for the Church to provide a roof, a space, an environment where people are not judged but where problems can be shared and thus perhaps lessened and where mutual support can be provided. Could the Church broker more such discussions, and, in so doing, mirror its core principles of hospitality and how we should behave towards one another? Such gatherings would not just benefit those experiencing poverty, they could become a place of learning for rich and poor alike.

"Time to socialise not just receive help, so that those running the projects hear the real needs."

Churches are also hospitable when their congregations accept people who have different life experiences, for example those with mental health issues whose behaviour might sometimes be puzzling or challenging. Jesus is the example, but awareness raising and education would be necessary.

After their follow up meeting, participants in one focus group were invited to help with another pioneering church-led project - a cafe and social meeting place for people who have no homes or whose housing is unstable. This offered the opportunity for them to continue to participate – an embryonic experience of the Church as a community of hope.

We learned how the Church could start to replace so much of what the experience of poverty strips from its victims – and help to restore their identity as people. By seeing people as people, offering safety and acceptance and embracing those in poverty as a 'family', self-esteem and self-confidence may be rebuilt. Add in willing and caring volunteers who can listen with sensitivity to shared problems and the Church can start to challenge hostility and misconceptions and build foundations for mentoring and advocacy that address the whole person, not just one problem at a time.

"I am waiting to go on a group. If the church had a group - we don't have to have a qualified psychologist - just people talking. I am less likely to take my pills or cut myself if I am chatting to people. I am always upset, but to be in a group chatting you realise you are not on your own."

Food banks are great support, but for many in poverty there is a stigma attached to accepting that charity and a feeling, however ungrounded, of being judged. It is a huge step to ask for help because of admitting weakness. What is needed is a place where a person can be weak and vulnerable, which gives respite from the constant battle.

'Fight, fight! Exhaustion."

" Small churches need to step into the arena

A Church that is campaigning and involved

Participants saw bringing people together as a constructive way of creating platforms for peoples' voices and views. The local Church was expected to have a voice, to stand alongside the poor and speak out against injustice.

"Faith communities have alternative values – human beings are endowed with dignity. We can help people engage with their own worth."

However mixed values were also perceived and with these came a double-edged challenge for the Church. How can it be both a new community of hope for those pushed to the edge, and also use its position among the leaders of society to speak up for those same marginalised people, without becoming overwhelmed by the agenda and culture of the rich and powerful?

The Diocese contains a variety of Church experience, from buildings to social mix, size and wealth of congregation. But it was noted that some seemingly well-off and stable congregations have much to learn from their very different neighbours. Poorer Churches have much to offer which the rich can easily overlook. Prejudices and ignorance on both sides can be dispelled. People suggested twinning and pooling of resources, but it was clear that resources didn't just mean cash, but skills and awareness. For example, rural workers' knowledge of environmental issues. Pooling leadership and management skills could be a huge asset in capacity building,

"Churches learn from each other especially 'rich' churches learn from 'poorer' churches what 'riches' are, i.e. they're not just money; and how to be generous."

"In serving the poor, you are serving Christ, and through them, you meet Jesus. The poor are favoured by the Lord, and are at the centre of the Gospel." (Pope Francis addressing French charitable organisations 13th December 2014.)

In many areas local people 'own' their Church, even if they rarely set foot in it. Here too are potential resources for shared projects. Explicit comment was made concerning engagement with the 'establishment' who may support the Church financially, but will not necessarily know much about lives being
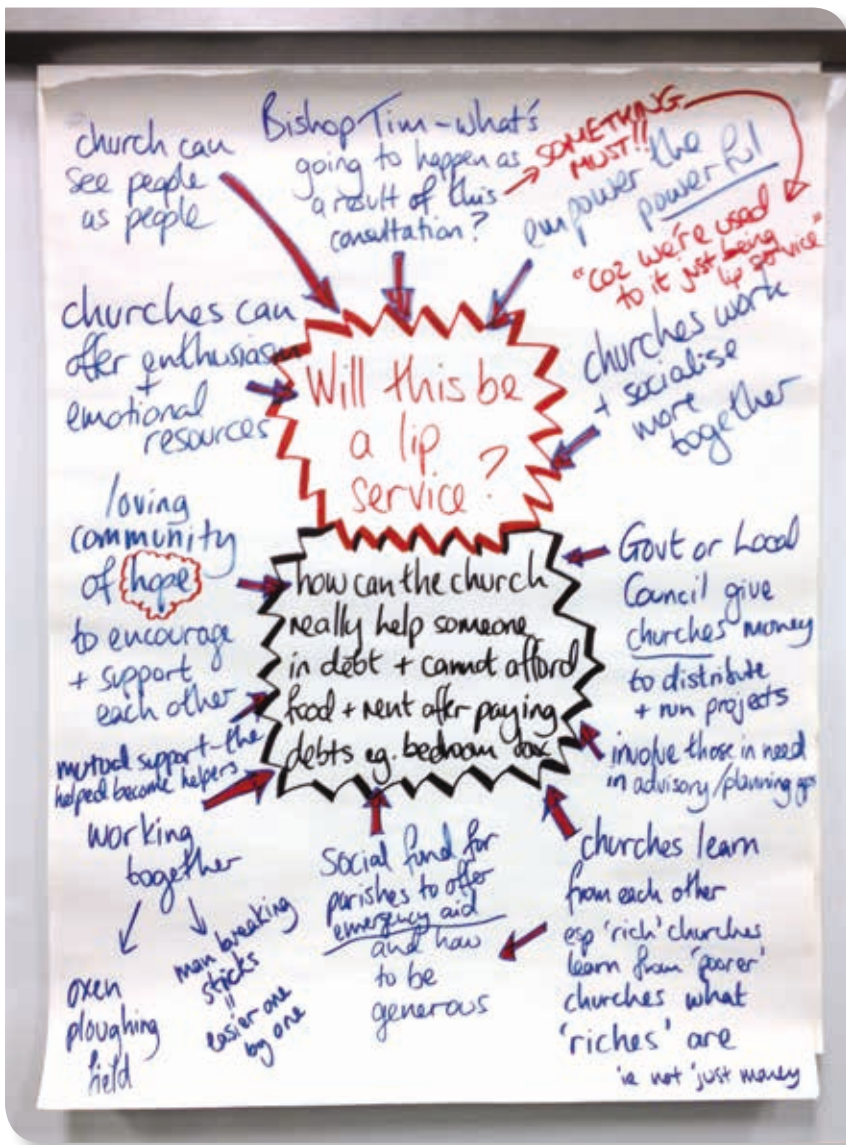
lived just down the road that are so very different from their own.

"Visit us!"

The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. Psalm 103:6

A Christian voice at national and international level

He said to me: Mortal, go to the house of Israel and speak my very words to them. Ezekiel 3: 4

"How does the Church use its influence to change policies? The Church is uniquely positioned to do this, through its influence with leaders of society, and specifically through Parliament."

One participant wanted to know whether anything significant would come of this exercise! It is a reasonable question, in that Bishop Tim suggested it in the first place. While he is shortly to retire, he currently has a distinct place in the House of Lords, as convenor of the Bishops' group there, and it would be a real shame if this opportunity was wasted. How can we help our Bishop and others make our voices heard in the corridors of power?

"We need person-to-person contact, but also the big headlines and preaching to change hearts."

Those who despair of any political action ask whether even the most passionate and well-informed oratory can make the slightest difference. Do we know what effect this Commission and other related research is having? Must we tell the truth anyway, even if nobody listens?

"How do you make people in power listen? How is the Council showing its listening?"

The Church in Leicester and Leicestershire has developed a strong reputation for getting involved outside the strict limits of faith observance. Interventions around community cohesion and in economic development have demonstrated that the Church can make things happen and move things forward against the odds. From what the Commission has learned, much the same opportunity is now waiting to be grasped in helping those in poverty.

The world is given to all and not only to the rich. (St. Ambrose of Milan – De Nabuthe 12.53)

There was a detectable warmth towards those in the Church who have spoken out in recent times, including our own Bishop. All this seems to affirm the will of the Commission to empower Church members and their leaders to find their voices, to draw others into the discussion, and to use the Commission's research to help them do so. These are legitimate questions for the Church to voice: she has the language to do so and could helpfully draw others, including faith groups, into the debate.

"…the preferential option for the poor is implicit in our Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty - - - the option for the poor is not ideological but is born from the Gospel. Situations of injustice and poverty in today's world are numerous and tragic – it is necessary to understand them and fight their structural causes". Benedict XVI (address to Fathers of the General Congregation of the Society of Jesus 21 Feb 2008)

We need person-to-person contact, but also the big headlines and preaching to change hearts

Collaboration and connections

"

Listen to the ideas of those who live here - they know the solutions

Shared space

The Commission was told, almost without exception, that significant change will only come about through joined-up thinking, partnership and working together. It was evident that some schemes already trying to tackle the issues of poverty were happening in parallel or 'just down the road'. We heard that, while there are some obvious strategic stakeholders, no one agency or group, not even a local authority, has either the means, the capacity or the skills.

This means that any lasting development will survive only if it emerges in context, tailor-made for the local situation and working with the local community. This will allow more effective use of existing resources. Councils and other organisations should also beware of being too prescriptive and instead support organic development and facilitate partnership. Of course, any commitment to collaboration and partnership must also include appropriate mechanisms for dialogue and information sharing and, above all, trust.

"We are lacking a network of people that will listen to your whole history, your whole story, and to try and put things in place that will support your whole story, rather than 'you just don't fit in our box'."

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Acts 2: 44- 45

Local ideas

"Listen to the ideas of those who live here - they know the solutions."

Many practical ideas emerged, with examples of existing good practice. These could form the basis of a useful toolkit for local communities, using local skills, and informed by consulting local residents. People recognised that food banks and debt advice were really important services, but that dots need to be joined in other ways also.

Among the ideas noted was the development of food co-operatives - using local gardens and helping local residents to grow their own food. One resident might lend land for another to tend and share. Gardening skills would need to be shared and developed, and, alongside this, might come the dissemination of cookery knowledge and shared meals using the food grown. This in turn could lead to healthy changes in eating habits and even local pressure being brought to bear on convenience stores to stock different products.

"Poverty can teach us to appreciate what we have; poverty forces us to look at living economically; poverty challenges us to turn a threat into an opportunity."

Some further thoughts included working with local schools to support families, for example, in promoting and developing breakfast clubs and school banks. Some local communities and churches offer volunteer taxi and minibus services to replace a poor transport network. This can reduce feelings of isolation and help the elderly, for example, to access hot meals.

Community-based recycling schemes, including clothing and sharing of tools and other items, were mentioned as being low-cost, practical and would promote neighbourliness. People could also be helped by being able to access the internet and receive advice on filling in forms.

For we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing we will be content with these. 1 Timothy 6: 6 -7

"The way forward is something joint to work on."

Not all communities will be able to embark on this range of support without some real capacity building. We need to remember that the development of any initiative requires time and often hidden costs, in the form of the setting up process and the writing of applications for funding. Crucial to the development of local initiatives has to be local energetic leadership, and the ability to identify what foundation needs to be in place before projects can start. Short-term contracts for service provision were not felt

"How do you get by?"

to be conducive to growth and development.

"Give the Church money for local projects."

Recruitment and retention of volunteers was recognised as an issue, but also that there is expertise among those who have experienced hardship. Volunteers come in all shapes and sizes, with different expectations and ways of contributing. Knowledge of community needs is one specialism. Knowing where to guide people to help is another - and both can be developed and affirmed from within a local community.

Food banks and food share
People expressed concern that food banks were now viewed by many as an essential part of service provision. For some food banks the turnover of clientele is large: but, while clients may come and go, the need remains ever present and, at times, acute. There is a clear need to continue to develop capacity and to support FareShare and other food outlets, while addressing some of the practical issues, for example the need for chillers and transport. This could be done through a coordinated approach to local companies and traders.

Although not specifically for the poor, it is common knowledge among the homeless community that Langar, the Sikh practice of serving food freely to visitors, is available at two main city gurdwaras. Other faith groups offer hot meals also, with a steady stream of clients. Regular lunch clubs were praised. It was suggested by non-Sikhs that others could usefully 'catch the gurdwara model'. A member of the Sikh community said, "It is an honour for the Sikh community that there is a significant uptake of Langar among the disadvantaged."

Communication
Knowledge of what happens and where, was far from clear. Some suggested better use of community newspapers, local radio stations, websites (including church websites) and obvious locations. This is something a community could input to and own, making sure relevant information is online and physically clearly visible. With some financial pump priming, agencies and organisations could be encouraged to collaborate in the use of local magazines, pamphlets and other outlets to advertise their provision.

"We need central knowledge of what there is and what there isn't. Central advertising of food banks – use leaflets, radio, magazines."

An emergent theme was the concept of street wardens, although not necessarily as prescriptive as the title might suggest, but local residents empowered both by their communities and by agencies to act as a point of contact and initial source of help and signposting. Crucially, this could be someone who would keep a neighbourly eye open in order to be able to support at an early stage, not just expecting the person in need to present somewhere. Training, teamwork and professional supervision would enable local street wardens to maintain a visible presence in the community, be clear on appropriate actions and perhaps offer some services directly themselves. It was noted that street wardens and good neighbour schemes (where voluntary practical help is available) could sit well alongside one another.

"People want to help but don't know what is needed."

Reaching those in need
People don't always seek help when it is needed. Many farmers, for example, don't easily go to the doctor - a situation compounded by the difficulties in accessing medical help locally or being able to take time off. We were told of people having an outwardly fine appearance, but pretending to fast because they have no money for food. Participants noted that some people will more easily self-refer for help where this is available in their neighbourhood. However others may be highly reluctant to reveal their problems, but could be identified as being at risk through such factors as council tax arrears, repeated GP visits, state of their property and garden etc. Organisations working with individuals in hardship mentioned third party referrals - a friend, neighbours, the vet, a fellow worker. Some suggested skilling up key professionals to be able to ask the right questions.

The reluctance to seek help may be related to

"It is an honour for the Sikh community that there is a significant uptake of Langar among the disadvantaged

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How do we make paid work the route out of poverty?

the stigma of poverty, or to the fear, real or imagined, of what may happen. This may be compounded by a not knowing. We asked how you help people with fears find out what is true or not.

"The lack of communication adds to fears."

There is useful information at ward and street level in the City, and similar information is available in the County. But in tackling poverty it is still difficult to identify the 'hard to reach'. Voluntary organisations, including the Church, may have particular difficulties in identifying the people they are trying to help. All this also leads on to the deeper questions of the purpose of identification and what to do with the information.

Financial matters

Participants expressed both sorrow and anger at the financial options available to people experiencing poverty. We were reminded of the ever-present High Street exploitations - betting shops, pawn shops, pound shops and BrightHouse. We learned of 'Brian', the regular local visitor, working for a doorstep

loan company, not perceived as a threat, but welcomed and trusted as a friend.

Both the role and image of credit unions locally were topical. Several sources indicated concern about current provision and profile. They felt current options to be remote and not providing the services needed in the places they are most needed, and wanted both products and criteria for eligibility to be reconsidered.

Alongside this came a clear message to understand and address the situation of people who fall below the credit union 'radar'. The question was asked - do we need a local Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI)? Possibly was the answer.

There is an acute need for sound, readily-available and free advice on debt and basic money management. This is particularly important in the light of single-payment benefits – which also raise the concern that universal credit, paid to one person, could result in some unhealthy control issues within families.

Helping hands under one roof

"Mrs Smith can come here and, bar the doctor's surgery, we have virtually every team here."

In Melton Mowbray a raft of different agencies are to be found under the same roof, often at adjacent desks - statutory and voluntary side by side. Walking through the building, it's difficult to tell who works for whom, other than their different-coloured lanyards. Workers know first hand whom to refer customers on to and often make the introductions face to face.

Customers are met when they arrive and a brief conversation sends them to the right place

as quickly as possible. Use of customer consent alongside data sharing agreements means information is shared so that working is joined up from the start. And that means no endless telling and re-telling of the story.

Satellite centres to the main hub are located at children's centres. Under the heading 'Me and my learning' customers may be referred to a whole range of agencies including drugs and alcohol support, the Princes Trust, a college or a credit union. The first conversation may be about money, but that quickly expands to a range of

other connected issues, where joined-up working is invaluable.

Officers talk positively of wanting to develop peoples' independence - financial, digital or social. They would like to see increased self-confidence and resilience, with people able fully to participate in the community. Rather than being reactive, they aim to be proactive and tackle root causes of difficulty, not just tackling acute need but also providing preventative positive support - for example to those within the benefits system who may be 'muddling along'.

We learned that this is also seen

as a Community Safety issue. Spending money to develop independence, rather than on more safety cameras, can be a better path to increased safety, ultimately reducing re-offending. The family whose children's behaviour is bothering the police may often be the same family worrying the housing department, social services, the GP and other agencies.

Joined-up, co-ordinated support is seen not only to make sense in human terms, but can make business sense also, if the longer term view is adopted.

Participants stressed the need for coordinated approaches to credit, debt management and other issues associated with the concept of financial inclusion. There is a need for both immediate planning but also longer-term collaboration across agencies, including the Church, to create a comprehensive strategy around fairer finance.

Discussion between faith groups around differences in belief regarding credit and Sharia-compliant loans, for example, were suggested as potentially useful to see whether a coordinated approach could be developed to offer ethical alternatives to high interest loans.

The issue of working poverty surfaced time and again. People told of the strain of doing several jobs to make ends meet, leading to another poverty - the poverty of time.

Hubs

The concept of local hubs emerged repeatedly - where different agencies come together under the same roof in places where people might naturally visit. Interestingly, though, while existing good practice could be identified, there were differing views on what or where these hubs might be - suggesting the need for more thinking at community level. For some the hub could be the church, for others the surgery, the school, the community centre or the library, for example. It was suggested the Church could locate in the community centre or become the community centre.

Any such hub could function as a 'clearing house' where useful agencies be found on a regular basis and where a food bank or cafe might be located, but also where local information could be found and trained volunteers would be available to listen and to signpost. Family support workers, currently being developed in Leicester, could be located there – along with a computer terminal, assistance with form filling, credit union facilities, and debt advice. This would provide a mixed economy of practical provision for local people. In rural areas a useful outpost might also be livestock markets. One such market in Cumbria, we were told, even boasted a hairdresser!

Alongside this, interesting thinking emerged concerning using existing places where people naturally visit and which already have staff in place to provide a signposting service for little extra effort on their part. Information could be cascaded to front-line workers in surgeries or job centres who, in the course of their normal work, could be equipped to ask one or two simple questions, have a set of leaflets, a list of local service providers and self-referral forms.

The concept of a triage process was on several professionals' lips. Proposals varied, but the basic concept was to provide someone frontline to meet, greet and assist, so that people can be dealt with as individuals without having to repeat their story endlessly and where they can get advice and signposting.

We learned of one doctor's surgery where this happens, with local volunteers providing a friendly first point of contact, listening and signposting. The aim is a more holistic approach to care, helping people who don't know where to go, and thus alleviating the pressure on them (which might be the reason they are at the doctor in the first place). This is not a target-driven approach, but needs to be developed alongside the concept of social prescribing and peer-mentoring.

"

…people can be dealt with as individuals without having to repeat their story endlessly

Local and National

"

Why use consultants? Why not talk to the people?

Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. YOU can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom."
Nelson Mandela

Policy

The Commission heard some real anger at Government policies and at the actions of local councils in closing services which were heavily used and prized. There was pride in mixed economies of local volunteers and employed, through local projects, and the suggestion that these could be more widely used, thus enabling savings in expenditure but also, importantly, promoting local ownership. There was a cry for those overseeing projects to hear and respond to real needs, rather than what they felt was needed. Some invited to council-led consultations felt their voices had not been heard and wondered why they had been invited in the first place.

People recognised that some issues cannot be resolved locally, but wanted to articulate them and find levers, of which the Church might be one, through which they might be addressed. While recognising that this Commission had a local focus, participants were keen to voice sharp concerns about national policies and issues such as a culture of individualism and what we mean by society and community.

"The state can't make people happy."

"If a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, how does this show itself in society? Does the way we treat the most vulnerable in society show the true nature of society?"

Prioritising

There was anxiety about colluding with injustice, an acute awareness of the effects of austerity and an emergent perception that poverty is increasingly seen by politicians, the media and others as a problem which would cost money to solve. This led to a concern about how priorities are identified,

both locally and by national Government and a desire for a change in narrative - spending money to solve problems rather than putting sticking plaster on them.

"Is public debate and popular opinion increasingly hostile to people in poverty in the UK? (E.g. benefit scroungers v. hardworking families, benefit tourists etc.) If it is, how do we offer services to people in poverty? How do we challenge the negative narrative and should we be challenging it?"

We need to build bridges between sections of society."

"It's actually very difficult to claim sickness benefit!"

In order so to do, success and achievement need to be talked about in terms of quality, not just quantity. We should help organisations to do that so they can justify and sustain funding. At least one participant cautioned against only embarking upon measurable goals.

It was felt necessary to develop a more nuanced picture of need. Public debate often focuses around the benefits system, but what about the pressures, for example, on the younger generation coming through? They cannot easily plan for their future and will be expected to work into their seventies. Local situations are not all the same and any practical solutions need to be tailor-made. There are pockets of poverty needing attention, for example - one street in an otherwise affluent area, easily overlooked within the bigger picture.

While we sensed powerlessness among participants, they had not given in to cynicism. The drivers which lead people to do the work they do were clearly alive and energising. The Commission must ask itself how this report can now act as a lever or catalyst to change the terms of discussion in our locality. How can we best challenge the terms of debate? Who needs to hear what both those in hardship and the professionals, also stressed by the issues and also feeling disenfranchised, have to say? How can we make these voices heard?

"How do you get by?"

Commission's recommendations

Recommendations

We are making recommendations at local and diocesan level. There is a need and opportunity to 'roll up sleeves' locally but it is also imperative we engage at higher levels – and in particular for the Church to continue to speak out and encourage debate nationally.

We must respond to immediate challenges, but we must go upstream to address the cause of those problems. The benefits of existing collaborations and partnerships across the Leicester and Leicestershire local authority areas, between statutory and voluntary sectors and with the Diocese and other Church groupings must be recognised and built upon. We believe this is a vital ingredient in nurturing strength and resilience, but also in creating appropriate structures and mechanisms at regional level which both respond to the national scene but also mitigate and provide a collective voice on a bigger platform.

We note the good practice across different faith and cultural communities and we urge these communities to continue to learn from one another. We recommend Church leaders humbly take dialogue around the issues raised in this Church-initiated report into existing cross-cultural and cross-faith groups for further discussion and potential action.

Some of what we recommend can be started quickly, other areas will need steady building of relationships, capacity and the will to make a difference. The toolkit for action included in this report shows how people can start to act.

1. The Church embraces its ability to make a difference

We recommend the Church at local level embraces its unique capacity and ability to make a positive impact on and difference to the lives of people in Leicester and Leicestershire and recognises this is an expectation from many people.

We recommend the Diocese promotes capacity building in terms of human resources to support activity at local level.

This could be through harnessing individuals' existing expertise, developing mechanisms through which these may be shared, and enabling further training of local Church and community members.

2. Churches understand their local neighbourhoods

We recommend local churches work to understand their local neighbourhoods, using the toolkit provided in this report, which includes examination of Parish Spotlights (provided by the national Church, drawn from census and other data and available on the Diocesan website). We also recommend hospitable listening events such as were used powerfully in this Commission's work. We recommend conducting an audit becomes an annual activity undertaken by PCCs or steering groups. We recommend this resultant understanding is disseminated throughout the local Church community and woven into local Church life at all levels - through study, theological reflection, prayer, preaching and acts.

We recommend the Diocese provide support and central expertise to amplify and share these efforts.

3. Churches provide welcoming drop-in space on a regular basis

We recommend that Churches provide unconditional welcoming, hospitable, drop-in space on a regular basis. Here guests may be honoured, mutual listening and learning may take place, relationships developed and people facing loneliness and isolation may find companionship. In so doing we recommend that local Churches consider how inclusive they are to people 'on the edge' - for example those with poverty, mental health or behavioural issues - and ask themselves what is needed to recognise the insights and gifts they bring, rather than see them as problems.

We recommend that the Diocese supports and sustains these local initiatives, promoting activity and sharing good practice between Churches.

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We recommend that Churches provide unconditional welcoming, hospitable, drop-in space on a regular basis

See Tool Kit for Change - Page 25

> **We recommend the Diocese promotes the development of different creative enterprises at local level**

4. Churches investigate how local support can be organised, including use of buildings

We recommend local Churches investigate how local support is provided, for example whether community groups are already running support programmes or food banks, or to what extent local authorities, police, charities or other organisations are already engaged in supporting people in poverty. Where such activity and networks exist, we recommend Churches broker the mutual sharing of concerns, ideas and future plans. Church buildings are valuable shared spaces where such dialogue can take place and all voices can be heard.

We recommend the Diocese, from a position of political and financial neutrality, should take a strong lead in brokering dialogue across all stakeholders - councils, voluntary sector organisations, service providers, employers and the financial sector - to develop joint strategies concerning financial inclusion and fair finance and addressing the deep concerns expressed in this report. We also recommend the Diocese provides central support to sustain and support local initiatives and develop deepening ongoing awareness of what will continue to be a shifting scene. We also recommend the Diocese actively promotes the collation and building up of shared expertise and knowledge across sectors, agencies and partners, giving starters of initiatives easier access to what they need.

5. Churches broker creative enterprises

We recommend that Churches broker the promotion of different creative enterprises and practical ideas - for example sharing of gardens to grow vegetables, cooking clubs, pooling occasional use tools and other items, help with form filling in, Wi-Fi access, transport schemes and community shops.

We recommend the Diocese promotes the development of different creative enterprises at local level and works to facilitate the sharing of good practice between Churches and, where needed, facilitates partnerships to support this work.

6. Churches work to provide signposting, support and advocacy

We recommend that Churches, preferably in partnership with other stakeholders, work to develop local strategies for helping people find help quickly and effectively, enabling engagement and appropriate support and advocacy. This might include local community champions, embedded in their neighbourhoods, with relevant skills and knowledge, who are easily accessible and known to be available. They might, for example, be located in a library, surgery, church or Sure Start centre.

We recommend the Diocese leads, in collaboration with others, in developing a simple one-stop electronic portal for easy access to up-to-date information about a number of crucial areas, including food and shelter. This must be well-well-maintained and publicised among all providers and obvious outlets.

7. The General Election is a time for questioning

The forthcoming General Election provides the potential for putting questions to candidates at hustings. Churches could discuss these beforehand. The Church could also invite candidates to a listening session in a local area. The Diocese can provide guidelines on how to run local hustings.

Tool Kit for change

One of the key recommendations from the Poverty Commission is that churches should understand their neighbourhoods and effectively take an audit of the local situation as a first step in developing their ability to help people experiencing poverty.

This toolkit gives a step-by-step approach to starting that work.

This plan is for two meetings, each of no more than one hour. Keeping the meeting short and to time gives people the confidence to invite and attend. They are meant to lead to action and to help congregations identify the support they need from outside their own resources, including from the Diocese to help them act.

You will need

Around a dozen people for the first meeting -perhaps a PCC. A leader.

A timekeeper (this is not the leader or a participant) with a bell.

A flipchart and somewhere to stick the sheets so they are visible after they're filled up. You do not need a digital projector.

First Meeting

Round [7 minutes max]

Each person is given 10-30 seconds (depending on the number of participants) to give their name and answer this question: What's the worst and best thing about living in my neighbourhood?

What we mean by poverty [3 minutes]

"Recognising there is no one 'right' definition, the Bishop's Commission on Poverty used the Church Urban Fund's three-stranded understanding: Poverty of resources; Poverty of relationships; Poverty of identity. Where resources are limited, so are people's choices and opportunities. Where relationships are under pressure or where communities are fragmented and hostile, it is difficult to thrive. Where people lack self-worth it can lead to a lack of resilience and aspiration, poor mental health and even substance abuse. These three strands will help inform our own conversations today."

Listening [20 minutes]

"To understand how people get by we need to be listening to their stories. First we need to hear from each other. Pair up with someone you don't know or haven't talked too much in a while. Spend four minutes each talking about your own experiences of poverty -either direct or observed."

At the end of this paired listening: How did that feel? What were the 'headline themes'?

Asset map [15 minutes]

As a whole group create an asset map of your neighbourhood. Inevitably there will be gaps. Draw attention to the questions that come out of the gaps in knowledge -write these questions up.

Actions [15 minutes]

Ask each participant to commit to having a one to one conversation with at least two people. Telling and hearing a story and identifying poverty themes.

Share out the questions raised that need researching

Who will each of us invite to the second meeting? Think especially (but not only) of partnership institutions.

Second Meeting

Round [10 -15 minutes max]

Each person is given 10-30 seconds (depending on the number of participants) to give their name and answer this question: Who do I belong to?

What we mean by poverty [3 minutes]

"Recognising there is no one 'right' definition, the Bishop's Commission on Poverty used the Church Urban Fund's three-stranded understanding: Poverty of resources; Poverty of relationships; Poverty of identity. Where resources are limited, so are people's choices and opportunities. Where relationships are under pressure or where communities are fragmented and hostile, it is difficult to thrive. Where people lack self-worth it can lead to a lack of resilience and aspiration, poor mental health and even

substance abuse. These three strands will help inform our own conversations today."

Discernment [10 minutes]
In groups of three agree two themes that matter. Feed these two themes back to the leader who will tally up and choose one or two themes for the church and partners to focus on.

Asset Map [15 minutes]
What assets do we have to help us tackle our theme(s)?

Propping Up the Problem [15 minutes]
Use the worksheet provided online "Problem to Issue" to begin breaking down the theme.

(See web address opposite.) This will help the Task Teams (see below).

Task Teams [5 minutes]
"This is how we can tell if we really have energy and desire to tackle this theme: if we can find a team of at least six people willing to meet for 90 minutes each month for four months then present their findings to us. If you are willing to be in that team please come and right your name on the flip chart.

Thank you!
Please thank everyone for coming. Make sure you have their contact details and keep in touch with them during and after the team has completed its work.

An asset map
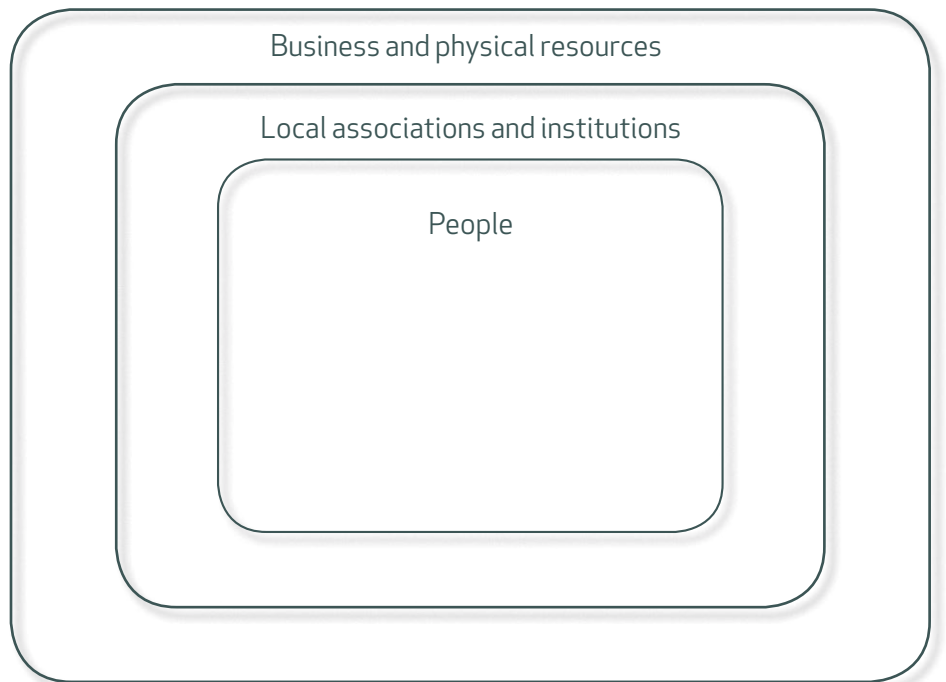
Poverty Commission members

Chair
The Rt Revd Tim Stevens
Bishop of Leicester

Members
The Revd Alison Adams
**Diocese and Cathedral Social
Responsibility Enabler.
Diocese of Leicester**

Emeritus Professor Mandy Ashton OBE
DeMontfort University

The Revd Canon Chris Burch
**Vicar of St Peter's
Braunstone Park, Leicester**

Canon Professor Richard Farnell
**Emeritus Professor of Neighbourhood
Regeneration, Coventry University.
Canon Theologian, Coventry Cathedral**

The Revd Dr Keith Hebden
**Pioneer Associate Priest and Seeking
Justice Adviser.
Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham**

The Revd Adrian Jones
**Chaplain and Policy Advisor to the
Bishop of Leicester**

Baroness (Ruth) Lister
**Emeritus Professor of Social Policy,
Loughborough University**

Ross Little
**Lecturer in Community and
Criminal Justice,
De Montfort University**

Danny Myers
**Team Leader, Policy & Partnerships
Leicestershire County Council**

The Revd Canon Barry Naylor
**Urban Canon,
Leicester Cathedral**

Surj Virk
**Policy and Projects Manager,
City Mayor's Office.
Leicester City Council**

Further information

For help, further information and background documents see www.leicester.anglican.org
and click on 'Poverty'.

Or contact The Revd Alison Adams,
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